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TABOO™

Created by
Stephen R. Bissette
and John Totleben

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Inside front cover by Moebius
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Introduction

If there's one thing a lifelong affection for horror stories has taught me, it's that death is *never* the end.

Taboo was conceived by John Totleben and me back in 1984-85. We saw great potential for horror comics, but precious little progress or vision being applied to the genre. Our collaborative efforts with Alan Moore on DC's *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* dragged horror comics kicking, screaming and bleeding into the 1980s. Having successfully transformed *Swamp Thing* from something self-pitying and stagnant into something more active, alive and dangerous, we wanted to push the envelope further with a horror comics anthology that would provide a collective focal point for cutting edge exploration of the potential we *knew* was there. Something *more* alive, *more* active, and certainly *more* dangerous than anything on the horizon.

When Dave Sim offered the means (via his short-lived publishing experiment Aardvark One International) and Mark Askwith suggested the name (thank you, Mark!), *Taboo* was born.

As always, John had more street smarts than a foolish New Englander like me, and pulled out of the venture prior to its publication. *Taboo 1* saw print under my own company moniker, SpiderBaby Grafix and Publications, in November of 1988. It was too much, really—too fucked up, too big (one hundred pages plus per issue), too expensive to produce, too high a cover price, too selfless a business agenda, too generous with its royalties, too erratically scheduled, and too confrontational in a market that thrived on escapist fantasies. But I believed in it passionately, and I could not be swayed from my self-destructive path.

With the singular tenacity of a pit bull, I sank my teeth into *Taboo* and fought enormous odds to keep my bloodied jaws in its flanks, despite the advice of friends, peers, associates and family; despite customs-busts that shut us out from almost one-third of our original readership; despite a growing procession of printers, production houses, and binderies refusing *Taboo*; despite the crippling drain on always-meager financial resources. Near death with its fourth issue, Kevin Eastman and his short-lived publishing experiment, Tundra Publishing Ltd., revived *Taboo* for four more issues.

After seven issues and one special (or should I say, *Especial*), *Taboo* gave up the ghost in 1992.
Not dead.
Undead.

Until now.

I felt very little control over *Taboo*'s destiny when its meat was still in my jaws. I've lost any sense of its direction since letting go. No matter. *Taboo* still touches my life, day in and day out.

Taboo's ripples have spread far and wide in its short life and undeath. A number of noble and notable efforts which debuted in *Taboo* emerged from its orbit, including the ongoing saga of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* (eight volumes to date from Kitchen Sink, the first of four volumes collecting Alan's original scripts, and the possibility of a feature film adaptation). Charles Burns's *Taboo 1* story "Contagious" earned its place in *The Best Comics of the Decade*, Volume 2 (Fantagraphics Books, 1990), and planted the essential seed for Burns's later *Teen Plague* (*RAW*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Penguin, 1989) and *Black Hole* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1995). Jeff Nicholson's extraordinary *Through the Habitrails* later appeared in the anthology *One Eye Open, One Eye Closed*, and more importantly, Jeff completed, revised, and self-published the *Through the Habitrails* graphic novel (Bad Habit, 1994; the original, unrevised version of the harrowing installment, "Cat Lover," appears in the book you now hold in your hands.) At my own suggestion, Tim Lucas completed the incomplete, serialized *Throat Sprockets* as a novel, which was pub-

lished last year by Dell Publishing's Delta 'Cutting Edge' imprint to considerable critical acclaim (the final completed chapter of *Throat Sprockets'* comics incarnation starts on page 41 of this volume). Rolf F. Stark's *Taboo 3* contribution "Love in the Afternoon" became the catalyst for (and prologue chapter of) his challenging graphic novel *Rain* (Tundra, 1993). Wendy Snow-Lang's *Taboo Especial* tale "Want" spawned the many incarnations of her ongoing vampire series *Night's Children* (currently from Millennium). *Especial* also contained the first "24-hour comic," invented by Scott McCloud.

The ripples continue to spread. Editors in the business (including those on DC's *Swamp Thing* and *Sandman*-inspired Vertigo line) call, seeking contact with *Taboo*'s creative contributors (leave me alone, folks). In the Finnish book-length study of the horror genre *Verikekkerit* (Otava, 1992), co-author Harto Hanninen cites *Taboo 1-5* on his list of the genre's finest offerings, right up there with Poe, Stoker, Blatty, Barker and the EC comics line. Michael Zulli's extraordinary works for *Taboo 2* and *5* appear in Rudolph Binion's *Love Beyond Death: The Anatomy of a Myth in the Arts* (New York University Press, 1993). Between bouts of bloody mayhem and homosexual passion, the tortured artist lead character of Poppy Z. Brite's novel *Drawing Blood* (Dell, 1993) sells a story to *Taboo*, and talks to yours truly over the telephone. In Jack Ketchum's new novel *Joyride* (Berkley, 1995; UK title: *Road Kill*), an unfortunate wretch is murdered clutching three borrowed issues of *Taboo*, fretting over number four's broken binding with his dying breath.

Just as I fretted over *Taboo*'s broken spine and unpublished orphans.

So much remained undone and unseen in the end. Among the many stories that had been completed for publication in *Taboo* were Jack Weiner and Charles Rak's true story of their UFO abduction experience, which was published in the wake of *Taboo*'s demise as *The Allagash Incident* (Tundra, 1993), coincidentally accompanied by Raymond E. Fowler's book-length study of the case *The Allagash Abductions* (Wild Flower Press, 1993). Leslie Black's profoundly moving *Things Happen* was intended for a *Taboo* special entitled *Sticks and Stones*, an anthology of stories about childhood emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Alas, *Sticks and Stones* was another casualty, but Leslie thankfully self-published *Things Happen: A Fairy Tale* (Asymmetrical Books, 1992). These are well worth seeking out, and an essential addition to any *Taboo* devotee's library.

There were so many, many more: Michael McDowell and Tim Burton's sardonic "The Oyster Boy," completed but *lost* in the shuffle of Burton's post-*Batman* career; Aidan Potts and David Thorpe's remarkable *After Life* series was barely launched in *Taboo*'s final issue, along with Neil Gaiman and Michael Zulli's ambitious but stillborn *Sweeney Todd* novel, with only its "Penny Dreadful" preview, prologue chapter, and exquisite color promo poster providing testimonials to its still-promised completion at some later date. And how long will Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's *Lost Girls* remain lost?

Taboo was eviscerated and autocannibalized by its own ambitions and accomplishments. Though I shuddered when the first mortal blow was struck by the initial *From Hell* collection, I'm glad now, do you hear me? I only wish I could have savored, rather than shared, its death throes!

I'm glad *Taboo* was gutted like an organ bank while it was still walking, that it was heartlessly abandoned by its creators. *Taboo* demanded so much, more than I could continue to give. No longer possessed like a madman, no longer wishing to be a thankless midwife and proprietor to its insatiable needs, I, too, abandoned it, leaving it as everyone else had: unwanted, dismembered and exsanguinated, its rank heat dissipating in an unforgiving night.

Undead.

And now, here I am, like some bastard Frankenstein, half-heartedly constructing an inadequate mate for the monster I abandoned long ago, crudely stitching still-vital extremities together out of a handful of

the excellent stories that had been completed, paid for, but unpublished in the wake of *Taboo*'s demise.

The initiated *Taboo* reader will immediately recognize this for the patchwork creature it is, rescued from the limbo of undeath, but hardly whole and complete. I'm sorry *Taboo* can never again be what it once was: I gave all I could, and can give little more. Much of what made *Taboo* unique was never mine to give. Thus, there is no more *From Hell* or S. Clay Wilson, no full-blooded introductions and creator bibliographies. What follows may seem a mere shadow of *Taboo*'s finest hour, but read on.

Though its scars may be painfully evident, this is an honorable and heartfelt assembly, a return to the roots of that first rough and ready debut issue. But where *Taboo 1* was sure of its goals and little else, these final two volumes (*Taboo 9* follows in the fall) are of a darker, more self-assured breed: certain of where they have already been, angry at what might—*should*—have been their rightful inheritance. There's still real power in these sinews, the eyes blaze in their sockets, the sex pulses, the jaws are wide with hunger.

I can still taste the blood.

Undead no longer is Jack Butterworth and Greg Capullo's unsettling "All She Does is Eat," the only collaboration between the veteran author of numerous *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Vampirella* stories (whose efforts had been singled out for praise by no less an authority than Stephen King) and an artist *extraordinaire* doing his finest work before blossoming into one of the stellar talents of the Image Comics line, delineating the adventures of Todd McFarlane's best-selling demonic hero *Spawn*. Here, finally, is David Sexton and P. Craig Russell's theological debate between "Satan and the Saviour," Rick Grimes's primary year celebration of "President 'Doosh' Quimby," and (as mentioned above) the final *Taboo* installments of Tim Lucas's *Throat Sprockets* ("The Disaster Area," masterfully realized by *V for Vendetta* vet David Lloyd) and Jeff Nicholson's *Through the Habitrails*. Here, too, is Al Columbia's disturbing "johnny 23," (sorry, Al—if I'd sent it back to you to redraw, it wouldn't be an authentic artifact of your pre-*Biologic Show* horrors), Matt Howarth's wry merger of Charles Dickens and Philip K. Dick into "Revenge," and Alec Stevens's stark illumination of Polish author Wladyslaw Reymont's sorrowful 1916 interlude, "Twilight."

Much as I may ache to drive the stake into *Taboo*'s black, bloated heart once and for all, I know that the horror stories have taught me the truth:

Death will not be an end to it.

Taboo will stalk me always, in the shapeshifting guise of hopeful creators who still send contributions to an anthology that no longer exists, of editors tracking down long out-of-touch creators. It will dance in the procession of foreign publisher inquiries, interview questions, stories and books and theater marquees with umbilical cords long since severed, withered, and rotted to dust. It will leer from the letters and contracts I must sign to reiterate, time and time again, that I have no legal claim on the material I once published in *Taboo*.

It will lurk in the shadow of what once was, what never was, and never will be.
It will follow as mist, as darkness, as bone and blood and bile reanimate.
Undead.
Forever undead.
The *danse macabre* is far from over.
Here's to life, to death, to undeath, to life after death.

Taboos, all.

—Stephen R. Bissette

The Mountains of Madness, Vermont, May, 1995

"IT'LL BE DARK SOON."
"SO WHAT?"
"I'M PRACTICALLY SIXTEEN."
"THE NEXT CAR WILL PICK ME UP."
"I CAN HEAR IT COMING NOW."
CRUNCH!
"DAMN! I CAN'T HEAR IT ANYMORE."
"DID IT STOP?"
"OH GREAT. HERE IT COMES AGAIN."
ALL SHE DOES IS EAT!
STORY BY: JACK BUTTERWORTH
ARTWORK BY: GREG CAPULLO

"NO MATTER WHERE I GO, I DON'T SEEM TO BELONG."
ANY PLACE

"JUST OUT IN THE COLD."

"SO I HIT THE ROAD."
"I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF."

"SO FAR THE ROAD HASN'T HIT BACK."
WHAT DO YOU SAY, BABY?
READY TO HOLE UP FOR THE NIGHT?
NOT YET, MERLE! I KNOW MY BABY'S ON THIS ROAD!

"SO FAR SO GOOD."
OKAY.
I HATE THIS! IT'S NOT EVEN MY KID!

"I FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY'S WATCHING ME."
THUMP! THUMP!
"THAT'S CRAZY."

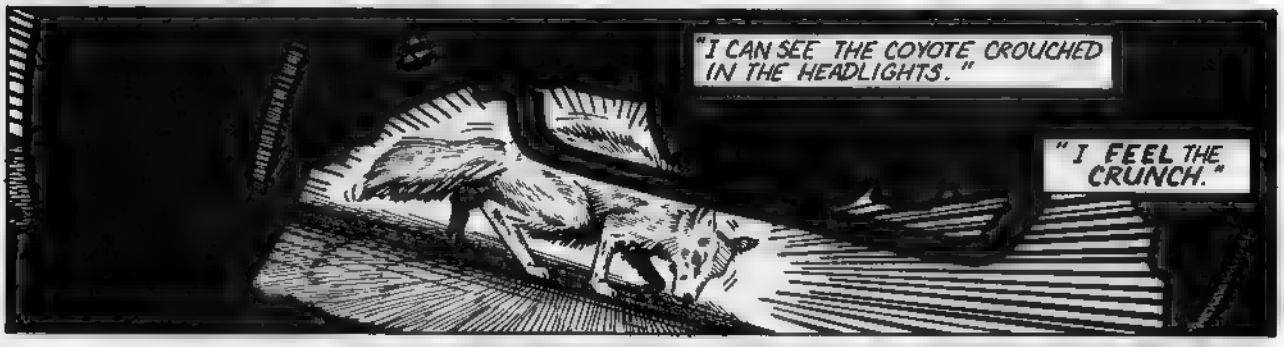
"THE DRIVER'S A NICE OLD GUY."
GLAD TO HAVE YOU ALONG!

"HE REALLY SEEMS TO NEED MY HELP."
NEVER CAN TELL WHAT KIND OF BAD GUYS YOU'LL RUN INTO ON THE ROAD.
THUMP! THUMP!

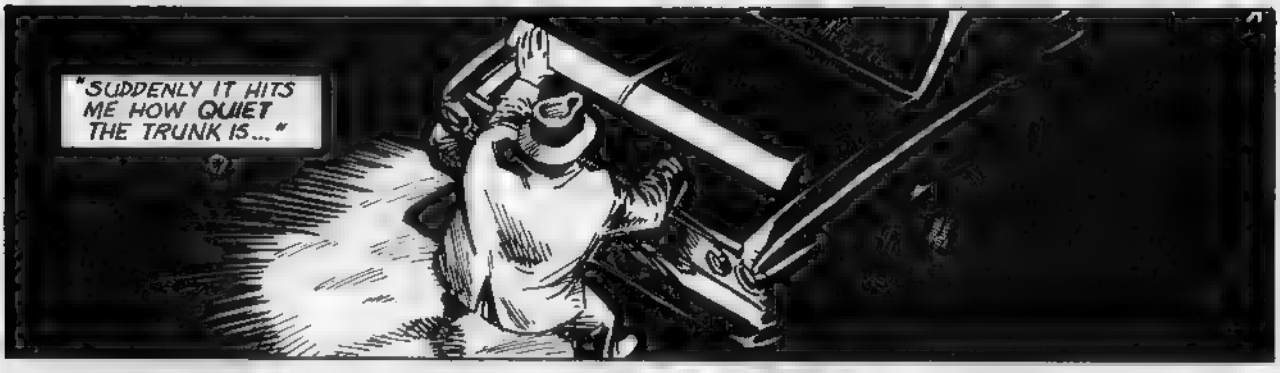
"I JUST WISH I KNEW WHAT THAT NOISE WAS."
THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!
THAT'S NOTHING.

JUST A DAMN SQUIRREL.
"I JUST WISH I BELIEVED HIM."

"JUST AS I START TO DOZE OFF, THE CAR LURCHES FORWARD."


"I CAN SEE THE COYOTE CROUCHED IN THE HEADLIGHTS."
"I FEEL THE CRUNCH."

"I CAN SEE HIM PICK IT UP IN THE MIRROR."
"IT LOOKS PRE-CHEWED."


"SUDDENLY IT HITS ME HOW QUIET THE TRUNK IS..."

"...UNTIL HE THROWS THE COYOTE IN."
YOU EAT THAT NICE! THE WAY I TAUGHT YOU!

"NEXT THING I SEE IS HIS FACE, AS BIG AS JUDGMENT."
AWAKE, EH? GOOD!

"I LOOK AWAY FROM IT AS LONG AS I CAN.
I WANT YOU TO TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THIS!

"THEN ALL I CAN SEE ARE IT'S SLIMY RED FINGERS AND CHIN!"
GO ON! SAY HELLO! THAT'S MY LITTLE GIRL!

"SHE GRABS ME! I CAN FEEL THOSE BIG TEETH ON MY KNUCKLES!"
GOOD! MAKE FRIENDS!
SNIFF! SNIFF!

"I TRY TO BE COOL ABOUT WIPING MY HAND DRY."
FUH-FUH -FWUH!
THAT'S RIGHT, HONEY! FRIEND!
"THE SMILE IS LIKE SOMETHING RUSTY OPENING INSIDE HER."
HE'LL HELP PROTECT US FROM THE BAD GUYS!

" I SEE HER JUMP AS THE BLOW ECHOES THROUGH MY HEAD.
BAD GUYS MY ASS!
FWSSS!

" I CAN STILL HEAR THEM TALKING BUT, THEY SOUND A LONG WAY OFF."
KEEP HIM COVERED, MERLE!

"THE WOMAN SOUNDS LIKE SHE HAS A SOUL FULL OF BROKEN GLASS"
I CAN'T BELIEVE I WAS EVER MARRIED TO YOU, YOU KIDNAPPER!

"THE OLD MAN SOUNDS LIKE TEN YEARS OF TIGHT UNDERWEAR."
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE HER MOTHER!
YOU KEPT HER CAGED LIKE AN ANIMAL!
AT LEAST I KEPT HER CLEAN!

"I CAN'T BELIEVE MY EARS."
SHE'D BE WITH ME IF SHE DIDN'T TRY TO BITE THE JUDGE.

"MY PARENTS ARE DIVORCED TOO."
SHE DIDN'T TRY TO BITE THE JUDGE! SHE BIT THE JUDGE!

"THEY NEVER FOUGHT OVER ME LIKE THIS."
SHE WAS MAD AT YOU!

"THE THROB IN MY HEAD IS DYING AWAY. I SHOULD DO SOMETHING."
COME ON, HONEY! GET THE KID AND LET'S GO!

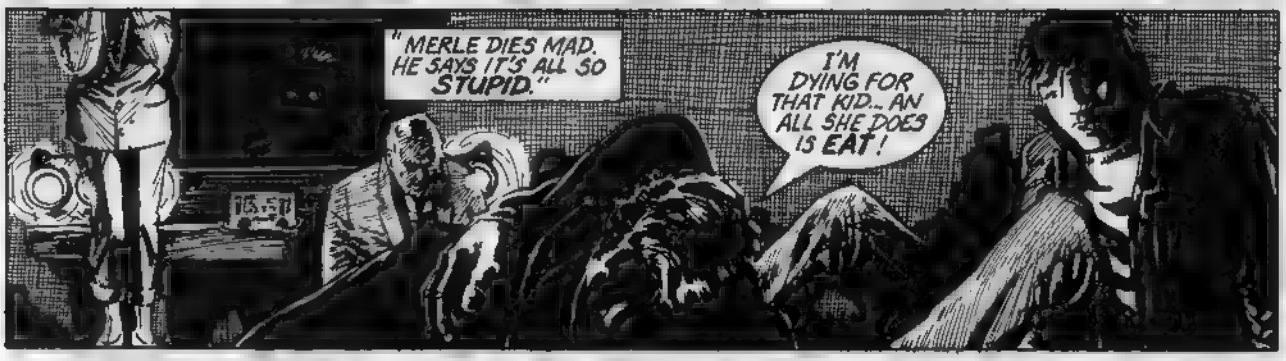
"I OWE MERLE SOMETHING."
OOOF!
LOOK OUT FOR MY BABY!

"WHAT I DON'T KNOW IS THE OLD MAN HAS A GUN TOO."
KRAK!

"MERLE COLLAPSES ON ME LIKE A BIG BAG OF SAND."
I WAS AIMING AT HIS ARM!

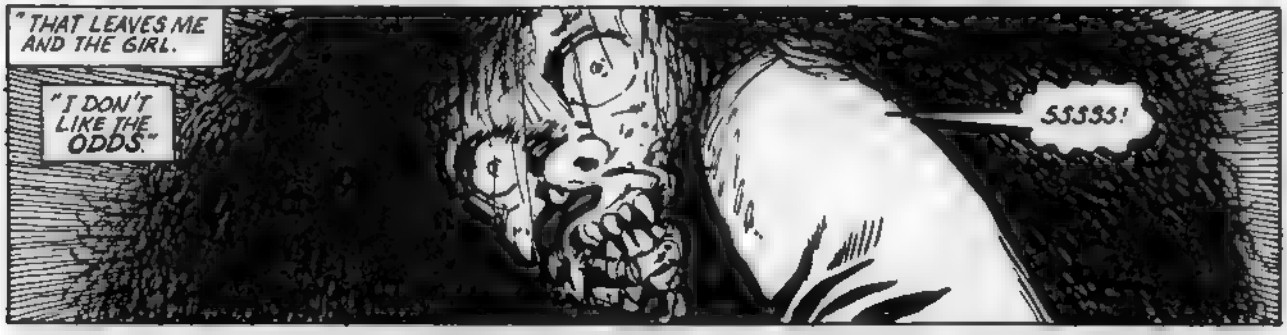
"ALL OF MERLE'S STRENGTH IS IN HIS TRIGGER FINGER"
BLAM!

"THE GIRL SEES THE WHOLE THING."
SSSS!


"MERLE DIES MAD. HE SAYS IT'S ALL SO STUPID."
I'M DYING FOR THAT KID... AN ALL SHE DOES IS EAT!

"THE OLD MAN DIES VINDICATED."
TOLD YOU... SHE LOVED ME...
GET OFF ME YOU... AAAHH!

"AND THE MOTHER...
"... I JUST HOPE SHE'S DEAD."
SCRUNCH!
SCRUNCH!
SCRUNCH!


"THAT LEAVES ME AND THE GIRL.
"I DON'T LIKE THE ODDS."
SSSSS!

"I HOPE SHE'S GOT ENOUGH TO KEEP HER BUSY FOR A WHILE."

"I WANT TO KEEP HER AS FAR AWAY FROM ME AS POSSIBLE!"

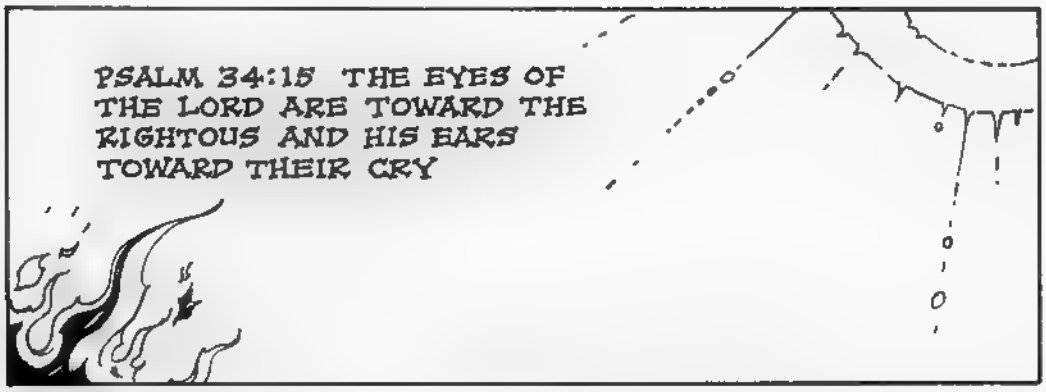
"HER AND THAT APPETITE OF HERS!"
SCRUNCH!
SCRUNCH!
SCRUNCH!

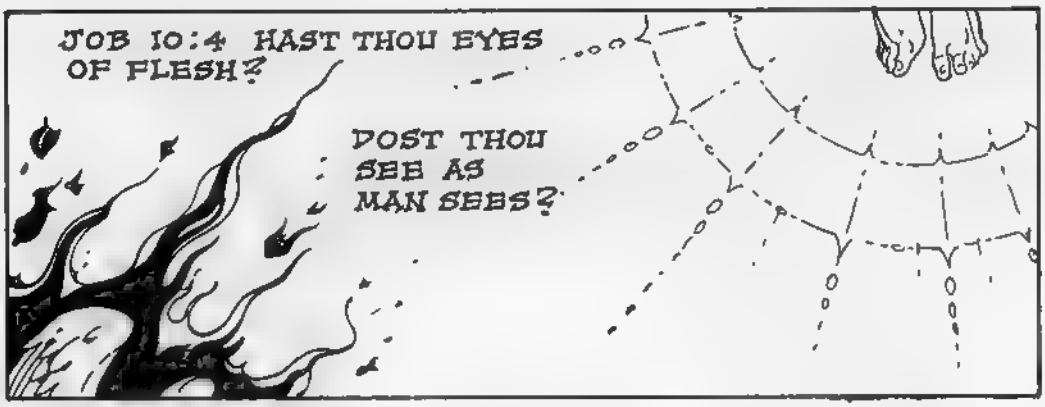
"THERE'S ALOT OF WIERD NOISES OUT THERE. I CAN HEAR THEM ALL!"
EATS HERE
2 MI.
PHONE

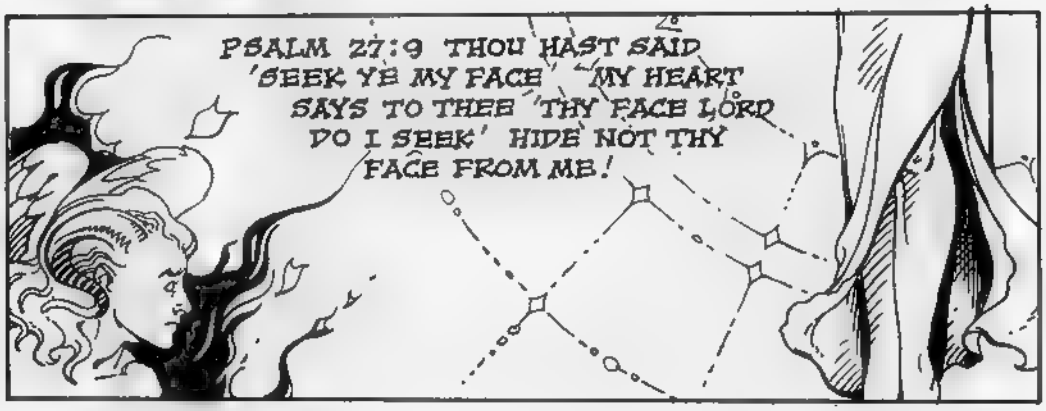
"I NEED TO CALL HOME. I DON'T THINK I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF ANYMORE."

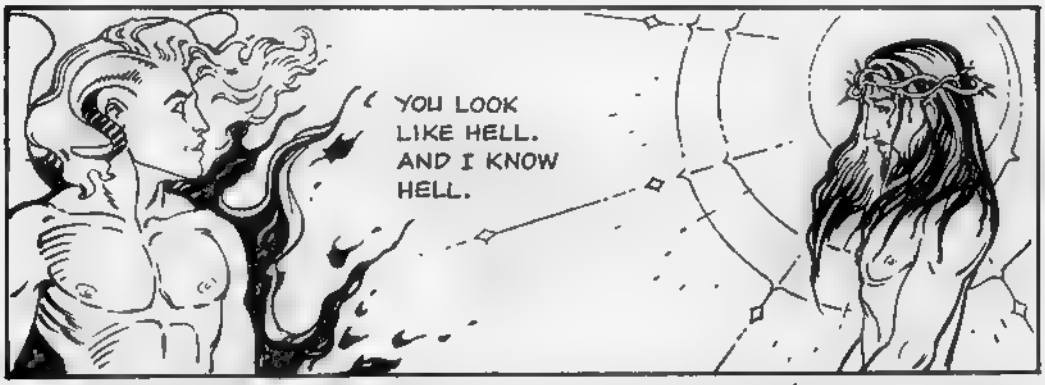
SKRRRUNCH
"NOBODY ANSWERS THE PHONE."
"THAT'S WHEN I HEAR HER!"
BRRRT! BRRRT!
SKRRRUNCH

BRRRT! BRRRT!



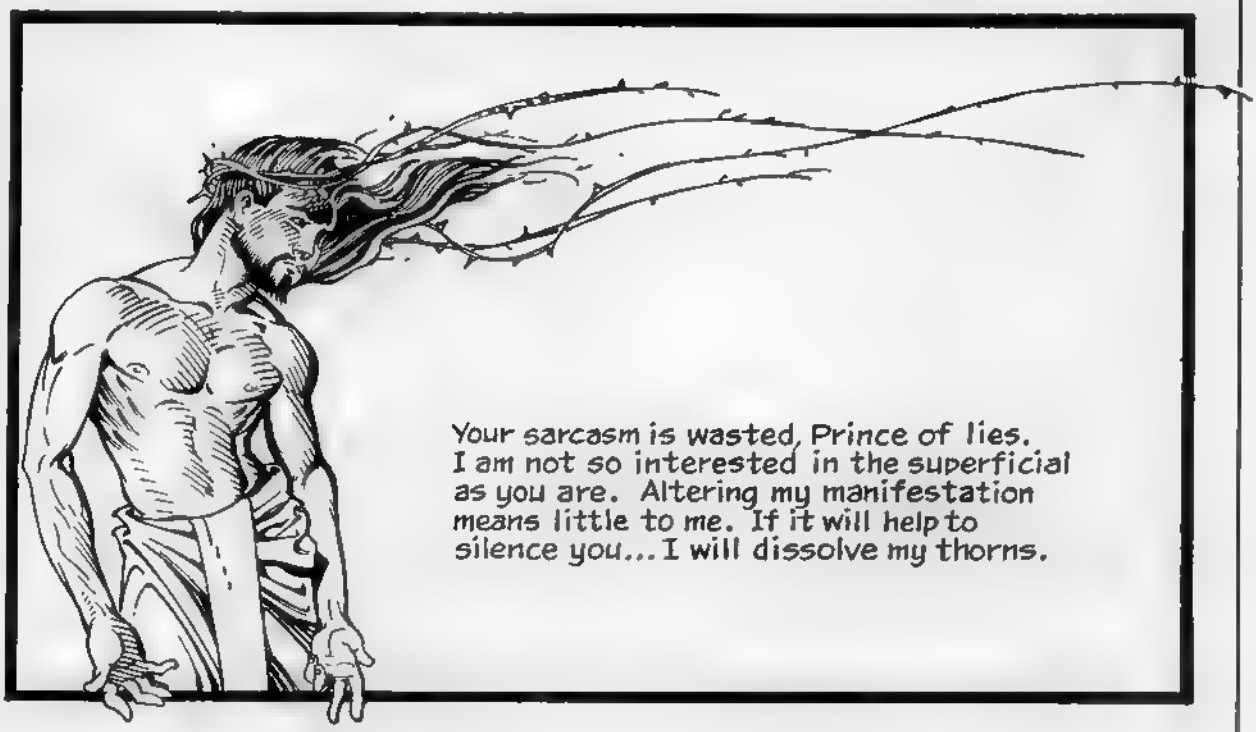


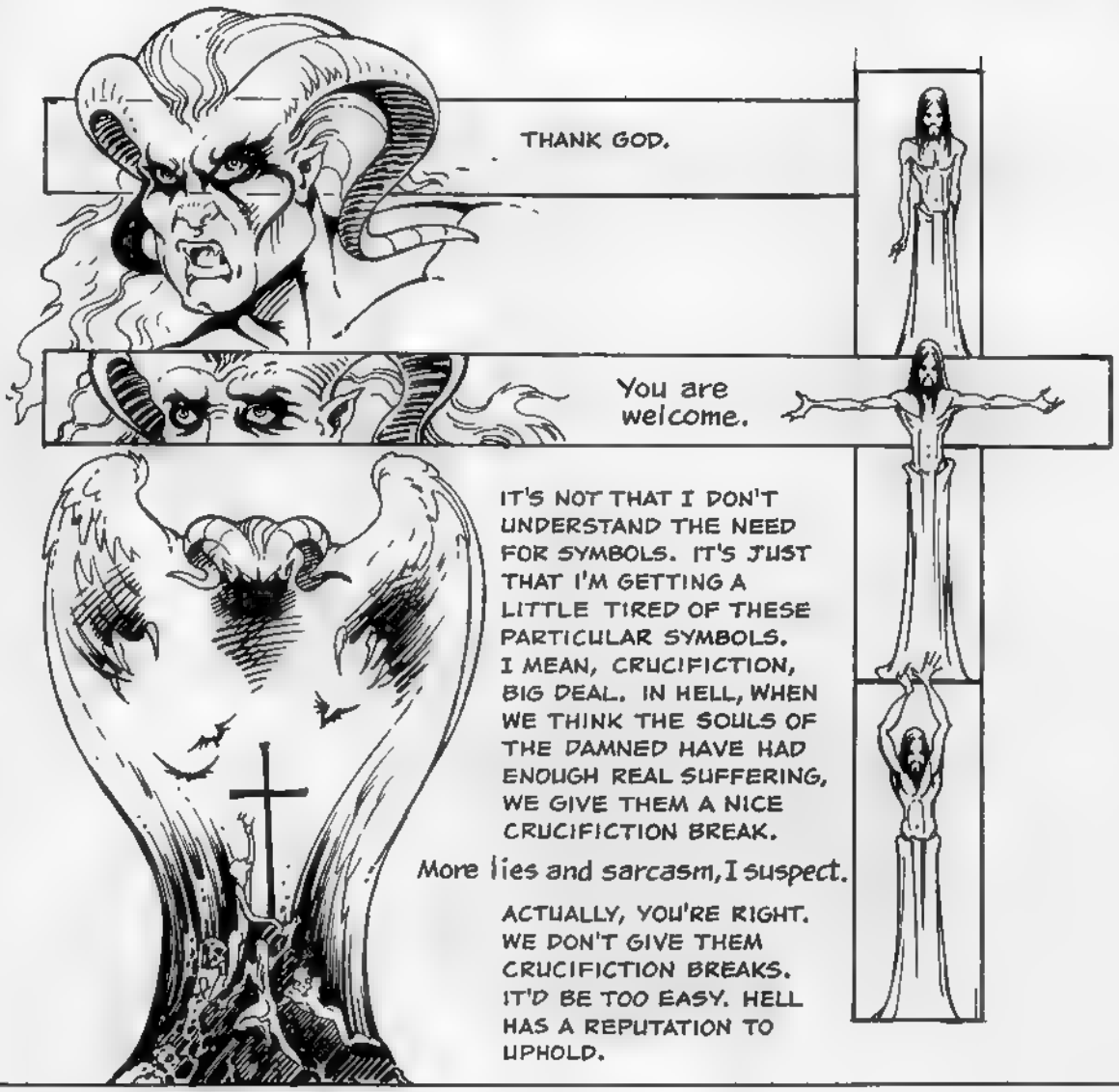


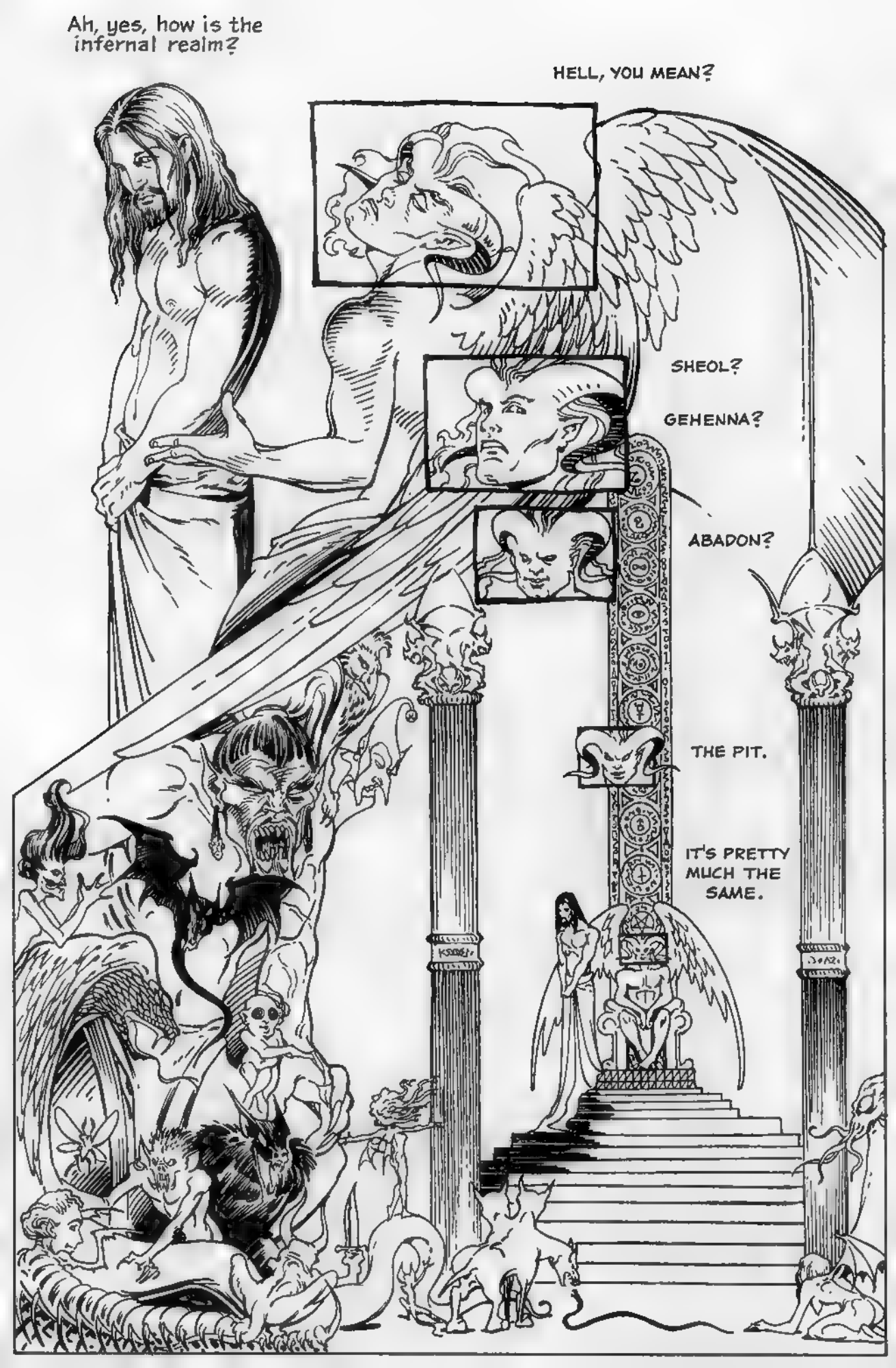


STORY AND ART *DAVID SEXTON*/ INKING *P. CRAIG RUSSELL*/ LETTERS *B. PEARSON*

REALLY. MUST YOU WEAR THAT GHASTLY CROWN OF THORNS EVERYWHERE YOU GO?
It is a meta-phor...
...for my suffering
YES, YES, YES... THAT DOESN'T MAKE THEM ANY LESS REPULSIVE. I MEAN, WHY DON'T YOU JUST LUG THE WHOLE CROSS AROUND WITH YOU — OR BETTER YET, YOU COULD MANIFEST YOURSELF STILL CRUCIFIED. YOU COULD ALWAYS UPROOT THE CROSS AND HOP AROUND POGO-STICK STYLE.

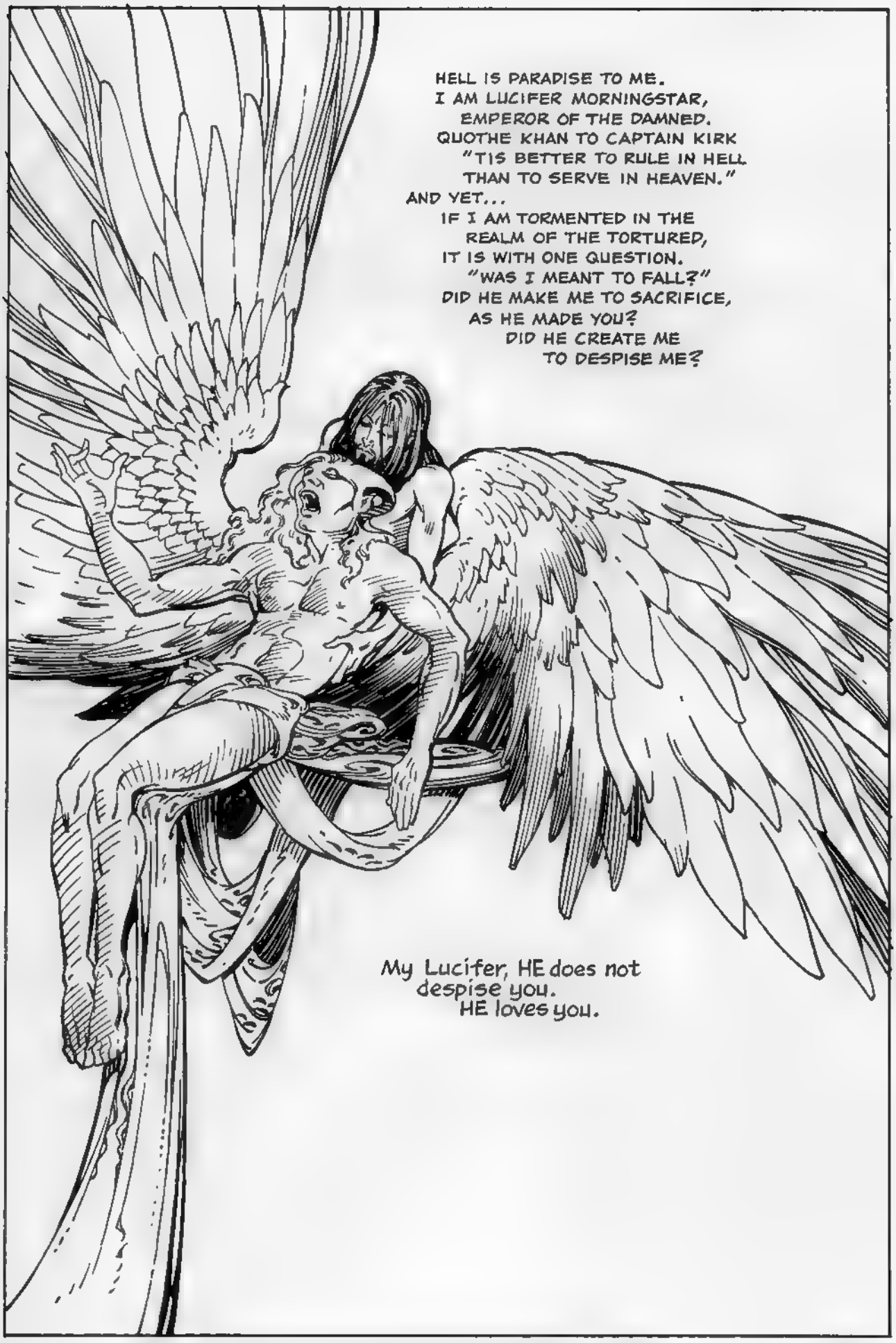

Your sarcasm is wasted, Prince of lies. I am not so interested in the superficial as you are. Altering my manifestation means little to me. If it will help to silence you... I will dissolve my thorns.

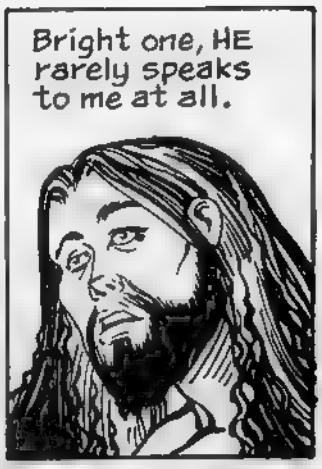

THANK GOD.
You are welcome.
IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR SYMBOLS. IT'S JUST THAT I'M GETTING A LITTLE TIRED OF THESE PARTICULAR SYMBOLS. I MEAN, CRUCIFICTION, BIG DEAL. IN HELL, WHEN WE THINK THE SOULS OF THE DAMNED HAVE HAD ENOUGH REAL SUFFERING, WE GIVE THEM A NICE CRUCIFICTION BREAK.
More lies and sarcasm, I suspect.
ACTUALLY, YOU'RE RIGHT. WE DON'T GIVE THEM CRUCIFICTION BREAKS. IT'D BE TOO EASY. HELL HAS A REPUTATION TO UPHOLD.

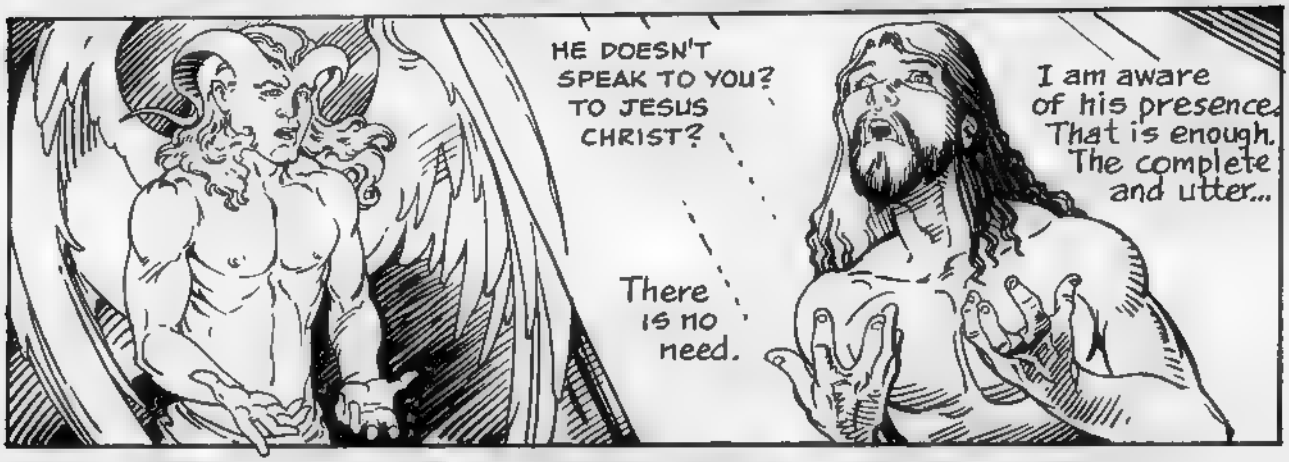

Ah, yes, how is the infernal realm?
HELL, YOU MEAN?
SHEOL?
GEHENNA?
ABADON?
THE PIT.
IT'S PRETTY MUCH THE SAME.

IT WOULDN'T BE HELL IF IT HAD SOME VARIETY TO IT. STILL, I IMAGINE HEAVEN MUST GET RATHER BORING.
no
NO?
The rapturous visions of HIM are ever changing, ever deepening. Each moment brings a new ecstasy, which makes the previous moments bliss seem as a teardrop before the ocean.
HMM, YES. SOUNDS QUITE NICE.
I suppose it wouldn't be heaven if it were monotonous.
GUESS NOT.

NOT THAT HELL'S THAT BLAND. I MEAN, HORRID PAIN AND TORMENT ARE...WELL....
monotonous?
I PREFER ENDLESS. HAS A BETTER RING TO IT. AND HEAVEN... ANY TROUBLE?
No. Not since you fell.
NO, I IMAGINE NOT. RAPHAEL AND THE OTHERS WERE BUILT TO LAST.
And you were built to fall.
I WONDER

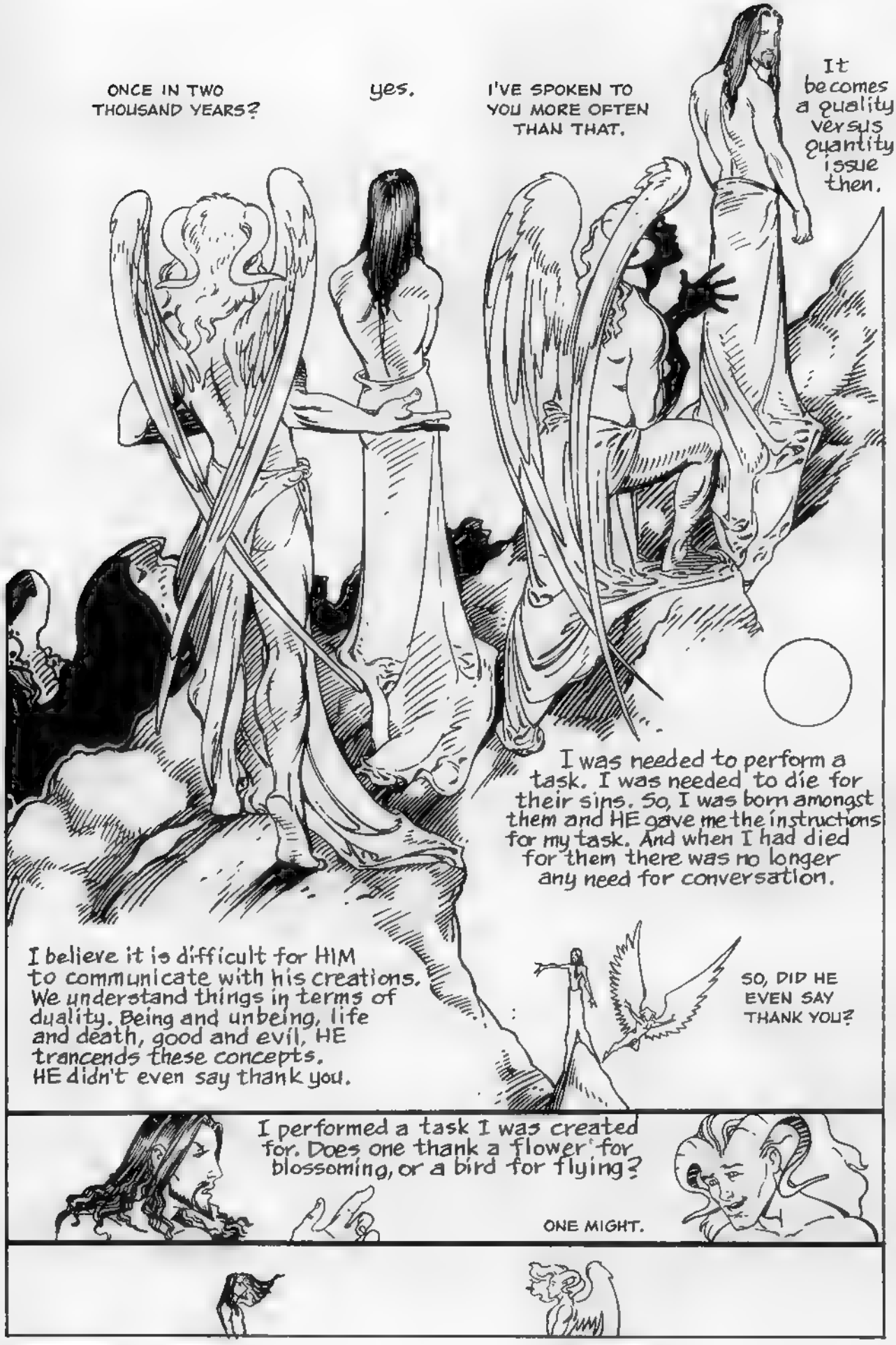

HELL IS PARADISE TO ME.
I AM LUCIFER MORNINGSTAR,
EMPEROR OF THE DAMNED.
QUOTHE KHAN TO CAPTAIN KIRK
"TIS BETTER TO RULE IN HELL
THAN TO SERVE IN HEAVEN."
AND YET...
IF I AM TORMENTED IN THE
REALM OF THE TORTURED,
IT IS WITH ONE QUESTION.
"WAS I MEANT TO FALL?"
DID HE MAKE ME TO SACRIFICE,
AS HE MADE YOU?
DID HE CREATE ME
TO DESPISE ME?
My Lucifer, HE does not
despise you.
HE loves you.

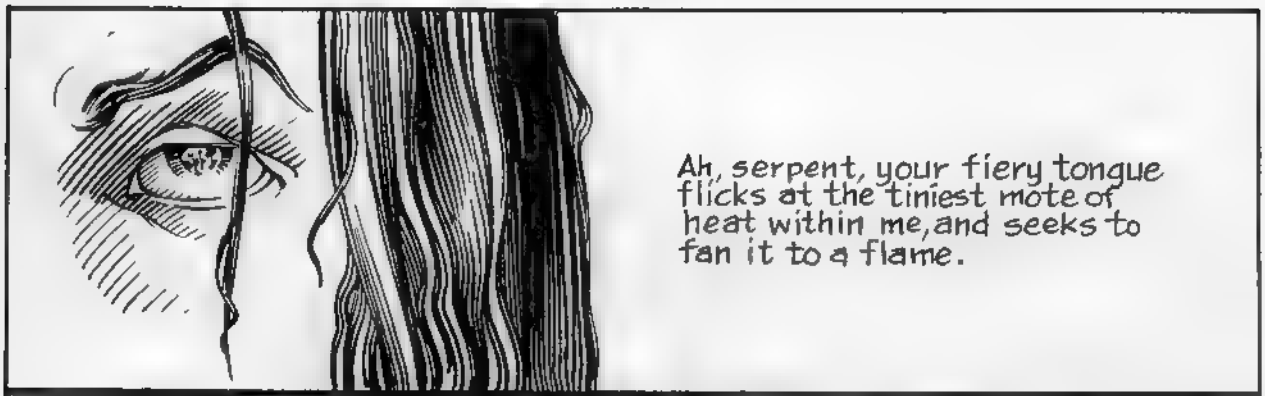




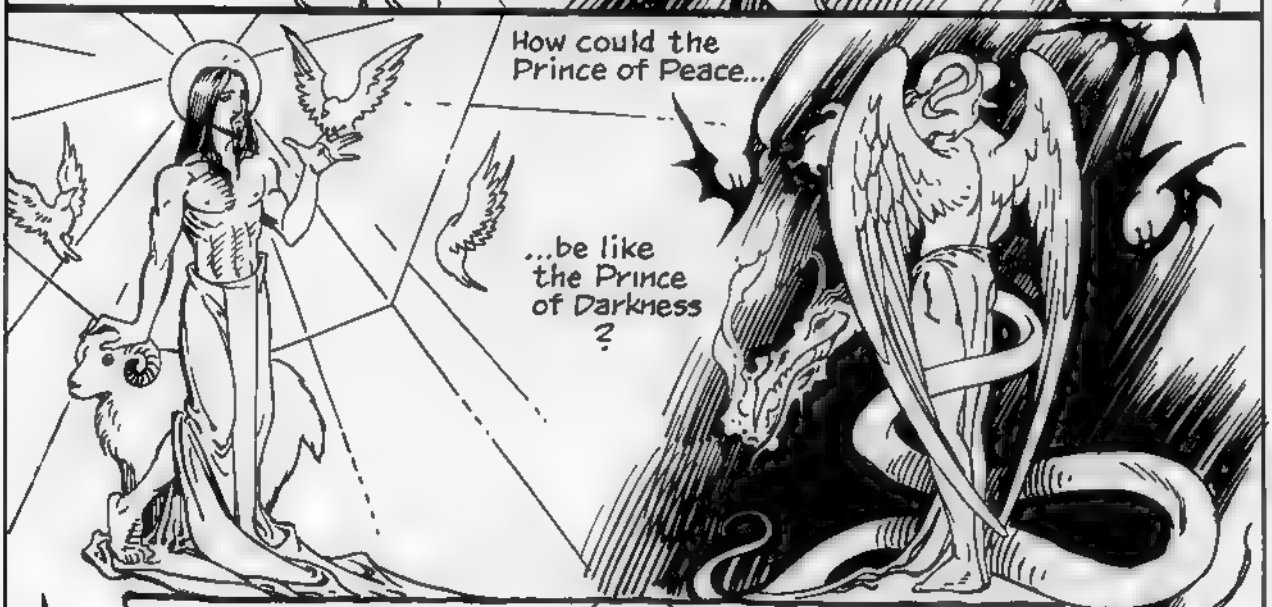
YEAH, YEAH, YEAH. SKIP THE BLISS CRAP. I MEAN DIRECT COMMUNICATION. HOW OFTEN?

once.


ONCE IN TWO THOUSAND YEARS?
yes.
I'VE SPOKEN TO YOU MORE OFTEN THAN THAT.
It becomes a quality versus quantity issue then.
I was needed to perform a task. I was needed to die for their sins. So, I was born amongst them and HE gave me the instructions for my task. And when I had died for them there was no longer any need for conversation.
I believe it is difficult for HIM to communicate with his creations. We understand things in terms of duality. Being and unbeing, life and death, good and evil, HE trancends these concepts. HE didn't even say thank you.
SO, DID HE EVEN SAY THANK YOU?
I performed a task I was created for. Does one thank a flower for blossoming, or a bird for flying?
ONE MIGHT.


Ah, serpent, your fiery tongue flicks at the tiniest mote of heat within me, and seeks to fan it to a flame.

NO, NO. JUST REALIZING THAT YOU AND I ARE ALIKE IN SOME WAYS.


How could the Prince of Peace...
...be like the Prince of Darkness ?

WE ARE BOTH PRINCES THEN. BOTH SONS TO A KING.

HIS WAS THE FIRST FACE I SAW.
I LOVED IT MORE THAN ANYTHING
JUST, NOT MORE THAN EVERYTHING
AND EVERYTHING IS WHAT I
HAD TO GAIN.

SO I WENT AGAINST HIM.

I DO NOT BLAME HIM.
I UNDERSTOOD THE RISK
AND I RELISH MY POSITION.
I AM HAPPIER THAN I EVER
COULD HAVE BEEN
IN HEAVEN.

STILL...

IT HAS BEEN SO LONG...
SO LONG,
AND
I WONDER IF I WILL EVER
SEE THAT FACE
AGAIN.

It is a wonder.

YES, AS ARE YOU.

MAY I TOUCH YOUR HANDS?
I DIDN'T MEAN TO BELITTLE IT. I UNDERSTAND THE CRUCIFICTION.
I UNDERSTAND SUFFERING.
You understand nothing. I gave myself willingly, while you were whipped out like a dog caught stealing scraps from his master's table.
HOW DARE YOU.

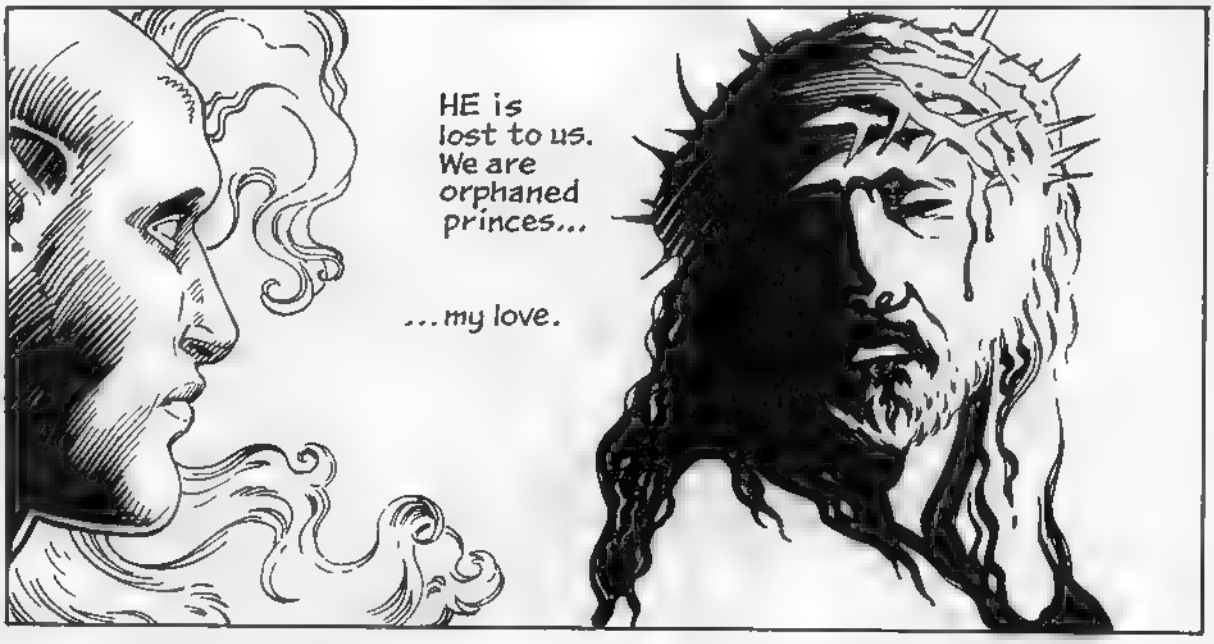
I WILL DRAW HELL OF ITS HORRORS, SCOOP THEM INTO MY PALMS AND FLING THEM AT HEAVEN'S GATES UNTIL THEY CRUMBLE!
THEN I WILL CLAIM IT FOR MINE OWN. THE PATHS OF LIGHT WILL BE BLACKENED. THE RIVERS OF SONG WILL BE SILENCED AND I WILL PERSONALLY PLUCK THE WINGS OFF EVERY LAST FUCKING CHEREBIM!
I HAVE A MILLION, MILLION DEMONS AT MY COMMAND, AND IF I CANNOT CONQUER THE FACE OF GOD, I WILL AT LEAST PUT OUT HIS EYES!

Quiet, my sammeal. You can summon your million, million demons. Bring forth your armies of fallen angels, their wings no more than blackened stumps.

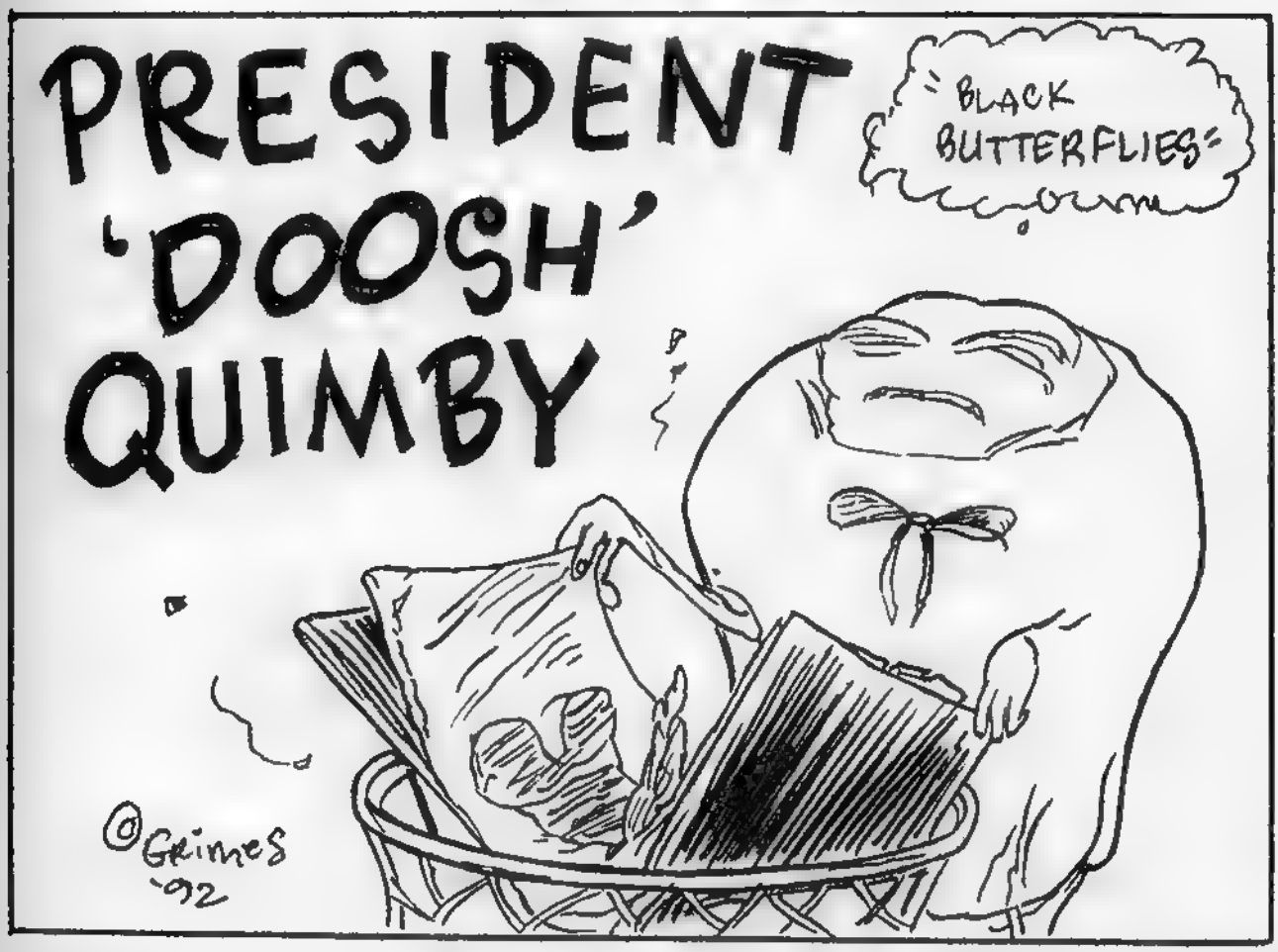
call upon everything that is dark and guilty. Where will you take them, lightbringer?

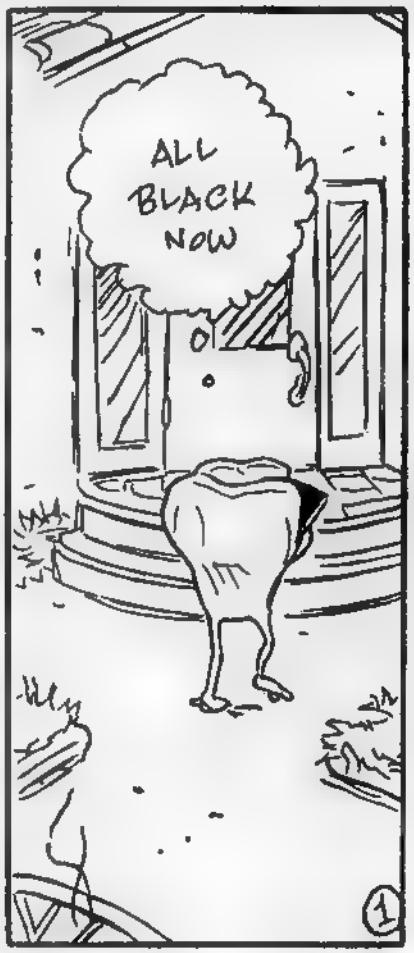
The eyes of GOD are not within reach of your dark and desperate fingers.

HIS eyes do not see you, and surely you will never again see them.



PRESIDENT 'DOOSH' QUIMBY



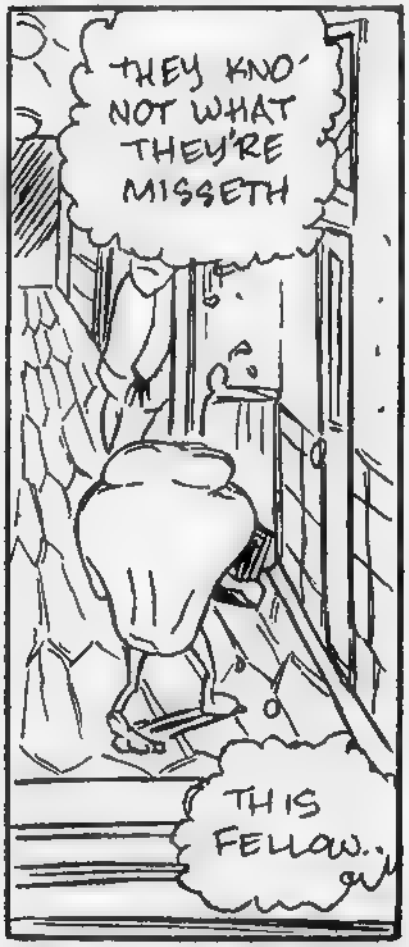


MUS SHOW TO 'TEACHERS'
FLINK

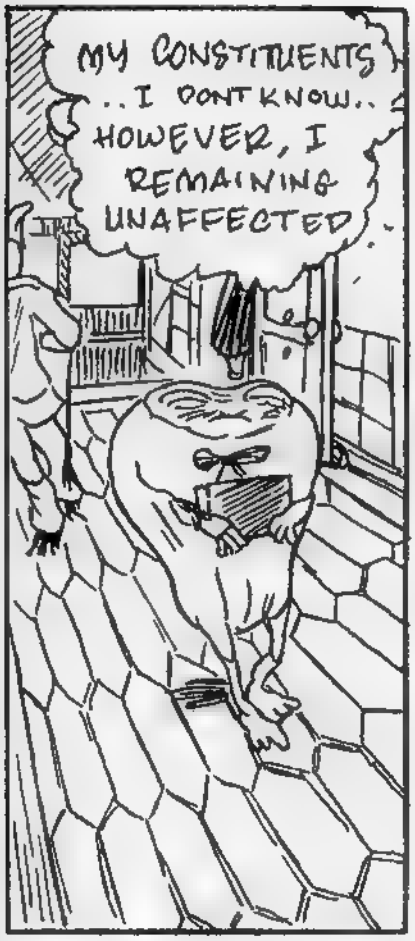
BLUH BLUH NHH
ALREADY HERE'S SOME

BLUH BUH
UH... "BLACK BUTTERFLIES IN BURNT BOOK STILL INTACT SUBMITTED FOR YOUR APPROVAL.."

KHAAHH
SHHH
PERHAPS NOT


THEY KNO' NOT WHAT THEY'RE MISSETH
THIS FELLOW..

OH
2


MY CONSTITUENTS ..I DONT KNOW.. HOWEVER, I REMAINING UNAFFECTED

COMING TO THE INTERSECTION NOW, I
AGH

A WOLFMAN... SODOMIZING AN INVISIBLE MAN
OR WAS IT A WOMAN?

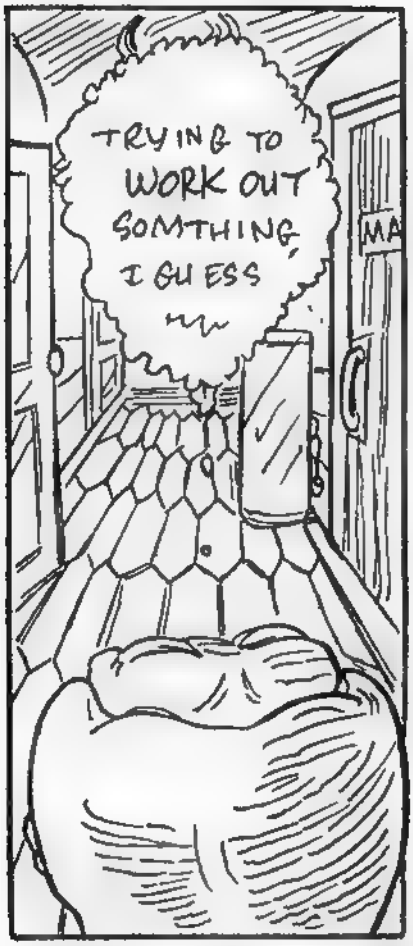
OR PERHAPS HE WAS JUST MERCUROCHROMING HIS FRIEND'S CARBUNCLE..
NNGH
I'm SORRY
I'm SORRY

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THEM
3

I DONT THINK I AM PRESIDENT HERE

NH
..I.. WASN' THIS DOOR CLOSED?

I UH..


TRYING TO WORK OUT SOMTHING, I GUESS

HHH
IT FEELINGS AM IN HELL..

OHHH
!NO HANDS AND NO FEET!..

THERE'S NO WAY HER CAN GET COMFORTBLE. ENDS TOUCHING MATTRSS WOULD REMIND
SOMEONE SHOULD TAKE CARE OF HER

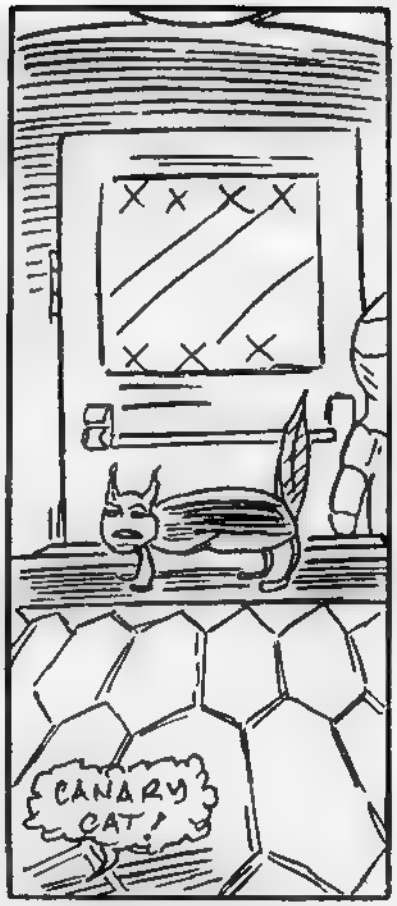
?

HEY, HOW'D HE GET HERE FROM ACROSS TH' HALL WITHOUT ME SEEING HIM..

KKRAK
..I..

PROBLY FOR TH' BETTER..
?

YOU'D BETTER LEAVE...


CANARY CAT!

THIS WAY..
OKAY
FLINK
YOU REALLY DON'T BELONG HERE

ME GO TOO!

HURRY, DEV
IF WE CAN
GET AWA

BOY TOO IN TIME
OHP
VWHOOP
SORRY KIDS BUT I WAS JUS' PASSING THROO

THE DISASTER AREA

SCRIPT : TIM LUCAS ARTWORK : DAVID LLOYD LETTERS : ELLIE DE VILLE

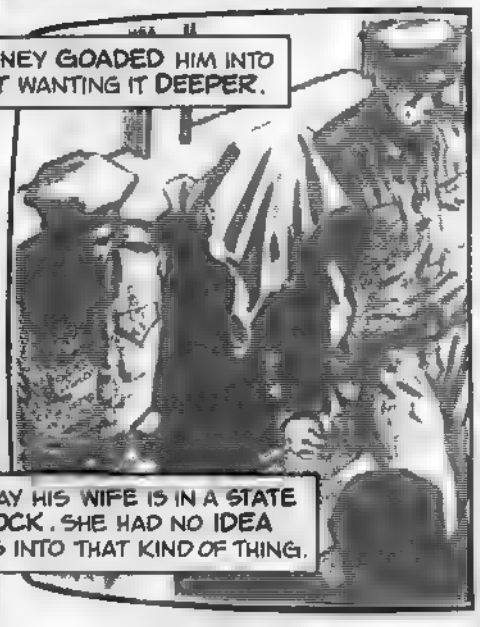
AS MOST OF US IN THE OFFICE KNEW, JANEY HAD BEEN IN LOVE WITH A MARRIED MAN FOR SOME TIME.

SOME OF THE GIRLS HAD SPOKEN TO HER ABOUT IT, BECAUSE WHATEVER WAS GOING ON THERE HAD BEGUN TO INTERFERE WITH HER WORK.
IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THEIR AFFAIR WAS APPROACHING SOME INEVITABLE POINT OF CRISIS AND, PRIVATELY, I'M SURE THAT EACH OF US SENSED THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
A SUICIDE, MAYBE. BUT NOT THIS.

JANEY, PLEASE.

SOMETIME DURING THE NIGHT, JANEY DIED WHILE SPROCKETING WITH HER FRIEND. HE'S BEEN PLACED UNDER ARREST. THEY'RE CALLING IT A CRIME OF PASSION.

HE SAYS JANEY GOADED HIM INTO IT. SHE KEPT WANTING IT DEEPER.


THEY SAY HIS WIFE IS IN A STATE OF SHOCK. SHE HAD NO IDEA HE WAS INTO THAT KIND OF THING.

THE FUNERAL WAS IN JERSEY CITY YESTERDAY MORNING. WE ALL GOT THE DAY OFF AND DROVE TO THE FUNERAL HOME IN SEPARATE CARS.
RUSSLT FALLS FUNERAL HOME
I DON'T KNOW; I WAS FINE UNTIL I GOT THERE, AND THEN I WAS RCOME -- I DON'T KNOW -- BY THE SICKENINGLY RICH SMELL OF FLOWERS I HADN'T EXPECTED -- BY SEEING EVERYONE FROM THE OFFICE DRESSED IN MOURNING -- IT WAS LIKE I WAS BEING SHOWN A GLIMPSE OF HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DRESSED, HOW THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN, HAD -- YOU KNOW --
PARL 1 FORTU
HAD YOU BEEN IN JANEY'S PLACE.
HM-HM.

I JOINED THE LINE OF MOURNERS WAITING TO VIEW THE BODY. THE SMELL OF FLOWERS BECAME MORE INTENSE AS I APPROACHED THE CASKET.

SOON IT WAS MY TURN. I SWALLOWED AGAINST THE LUMP THAT HAD BEEN IN MY THROAT EVER SINCE I HEARD AND WOULDN'T DISSOLVE AND I-- LOOKED DOWN AT HER.
THE LUMP STAYED.
I DISSOLVED.

SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

OH, MY GOD!

WHY DIDN'T YOU... WHY DIDN'T ANYBODY... WARN...?

FOR SOME REASON, THE MORTICIAN HAD BEEN UNABLE TO RECONSTRUCT JANEY'S THROAT. IT LOOKED LIKE HER HEAD HAD BEEN RECONNECTED DIRECTLY TO HER SHOULDERS.

GOD HELP HER, DOCTOR-- JANEY DIDN'T HAVE A NECK!

CARLA -- THAT'S JANEY'S ROOMMATE -- FOUND ME OUTSIDE SOMEWHERE NEAR THE PARKING LOT. WE HAD MET ONCE BEFORE, A FEW MONTHS AGO, AT THE OFFICE NEW YEAR'S PARTY
THAT NIGHT JANEY DRANK SO MUCH ...

SHE OFFERED ME A CIGARETTE AND WE TALKED.

SHE AND JANE HADN'T BEEN GETTING ALONG; THE AFFAIR HAD CHANGED HER SOMEHOW, SHE TOLD ME. THEY HAD BEEN HAVING A LOT OF ARGUMENTS.
IT WAS LIKE I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HER THESE PAST FEW WEEKS. HOW WELL DID YOU KNOW JANEY?
OH, NOT VERY WELL. I KNEW HER FROM NINE TO FIVE.

HA! YOU MEAN ELEVEN TO FIVE!
YEAH, RIGHT! SEE? YOU KNOW HER BETTER THAN I DID!

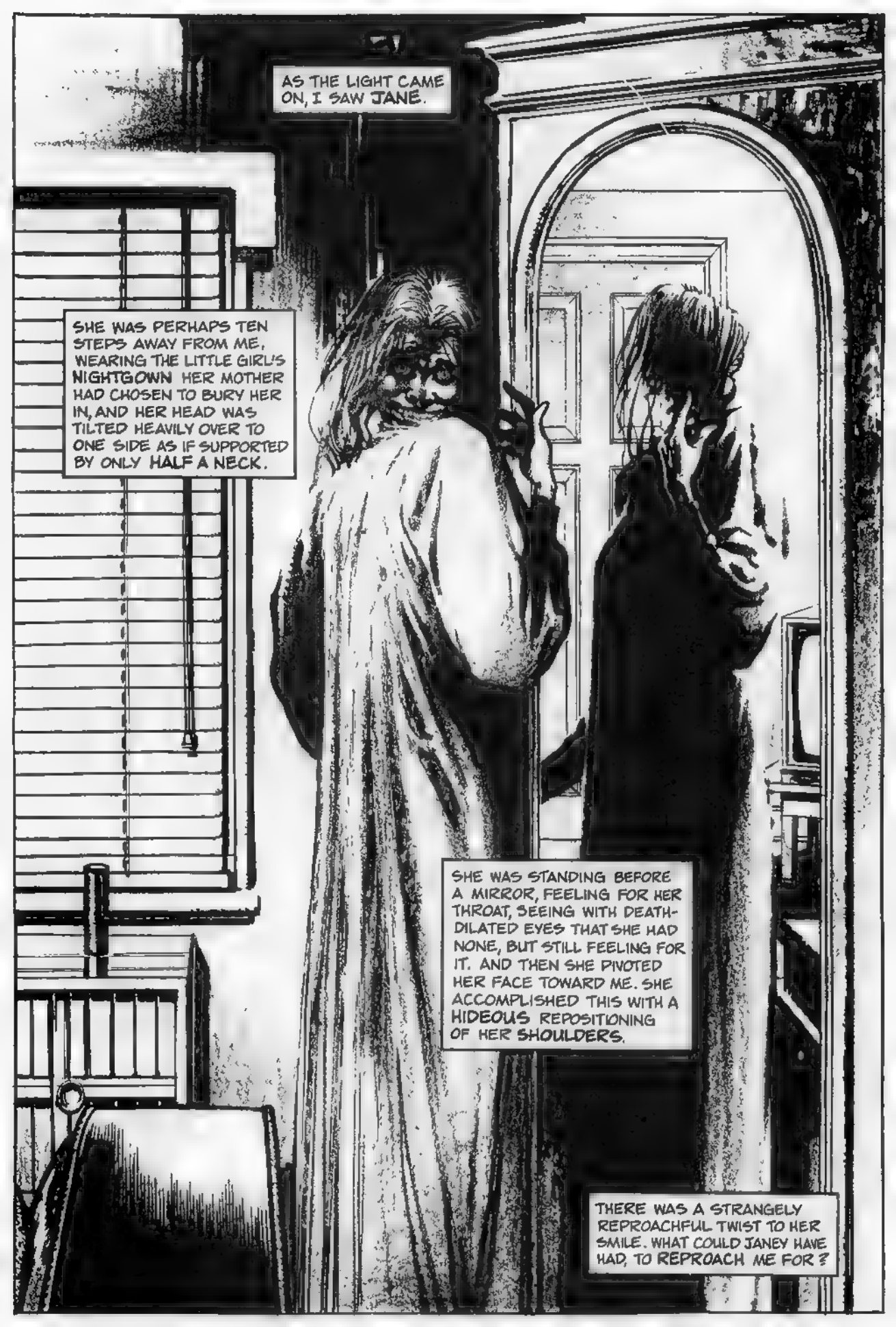
THEN WHY ARE YOU SO UPSET, HONEYCHILE?
THE WAY SHE WAS... I GUESS IT DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH JANEY, PARTICULARLY.
IT'S JUST... THE THOUGHT OF HAVING TO GO ALL THE WAY HOME -- AFTER THIS -- AND FACE MY STIFLING LITTLE APARTMENT...
THAT'S RIGHT, YOU'RE MORE THAN AN HOUR AWAY, AREN'T YOU? YOU SHOULDN'T BE ON THE ROADS THAT LONG, SUGAR. NOT TONIGHT. NOT IN THE SHAPE YOU'RE IN.

LOOK, I'M STAYING WITH JANEY'S MOM TONIGHT. HERE. TAKE MY KEYS. OUR--

--MY PLACE IS JUST 10 MINUTES FROM HERE.
OKAY. OKAY, THANKS.
I LEFT IMMEDIATELY. I JUST HAD TO GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE.

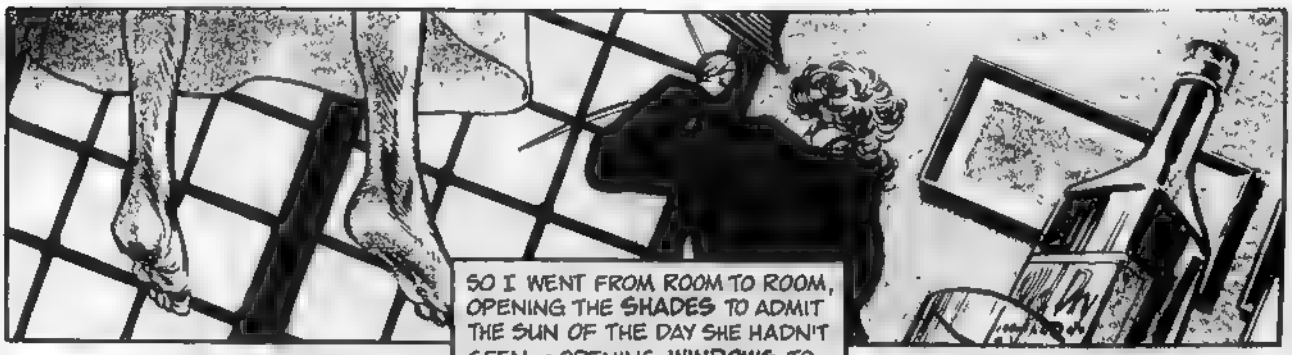
I ALMOST MISSED THE EXIT, BUT I FINALLY GOT THERE IN ONE PIECE.
THEIR APARTMENT WAS IN A QUIET, SHADY PART OF TOWN.

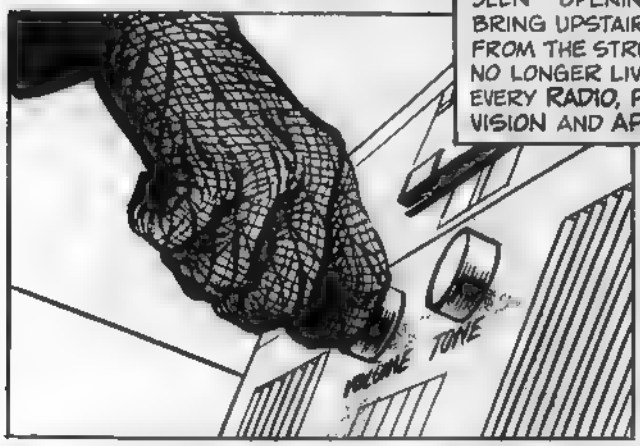
I UNLOCKED THE DOOR.
THE SMELL OF FLOWERS INSIDE WAS OVERWHELMING. MY FIRST THOUGHT WAS THAT CARLA MUST HAVE RECEIVED CONDOLENCES FROM HALF THE COUNTRY.
ALL OF THEIR BLINDS WERE DRAWN. THOUGH IT WAS STILL EARLY, EVERYTHING BEYOND THE LIGHTSWITCH WAS DARK AS PITCH.


AS THE LIGHT CAME ON, I SAW JANE.
SHE WAS PERHAPS TEN STEPS AWAY FROM ME, WEARING THE LITTLE GIRL'S NIGHTGOWN HER MOTHER HAD CHOSEN TO BURY HER IN, AND HER HEAD WAS TILTED HEAVILY OVER TO ONE SIDE AS IF SUPPORTED BY ONLY HALF A NECK.
SHE WAS STANDING BEFORE A MIRROR, FEELING FOR HER THROAT, SEEING WITH DEATH-DILATED EYES THAT SHE HAD NONE, BUT STILL FEELING FOR IT. AND THEN SHE PIVOTED HER FACE TOWARD ME. SHE ACCOMPLISHED THIS WITH A HIDEOUS REPOSITIONING OF HER SHOULDERS.
THERE WAS A STRANGELY REPROACHFUL TWIST TO HER SMILE. WHAT COULD JANEY HAVE HAD, TO REPROACH ME FOR?

I DID EVERYTHING I COULD THINK OF TO SEND HER AWAY. I SHOOK MY HEAD. I PLUGGED MY IN-VOLUNTARY SCREAMS WITH MY FIST.

I WALKED QUICKLY PAST HER TO THE BAR I SAW FROM THE THRESHOLD, QUICKLY FOR FEAR THAT SHE WOULD CLUTCH ME AS I PASSED AND TRY WHISPERING INTO MY EAR WITH HER THROATLESS VOICE SOME HARROWING QUESTION.
NOTHING I COULD DRINK WOULD MAKE HER DISAPPEAR.




SO I WENT FROM ROOM TO ROOM, OPENING THE SHADES TO ADMIT THE SUN OF THE DAY SHE HADN'T SEEN -- OPENING WINDOWS TO BRING UPSTAIRS THE SOUNDS FROM THE STREET WHERE SHE NO LONGER LIVED -- TURNING ON EVERY RADIO, PORTABLE TELEVISION AND APPLIANCE --
PHONE TONE

-- TO OVERWHELM THE APARTMENT AND BOMBARD MYSELF WITH THE REASSURING SOUNDS OF REALITY.
BUT HER GHOST, AND THE QUESTION ON ITS LIPS, SURVIVED EVERY ATTEMPT I MADE TO DEFLECT IT.

WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME ?
I SAID, WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME ?

STILL SHE SMILED.

AND JANEY SAID, "I CAME BECAUSE I MUST. WHY DO YOU ASK?"
I MUST ASK!

AND SHE JUST SAID, "THERE IS NO ANSWER."

THERE IS NO ANSWER.

AND I JUST LEFT HER THERE, IN AN APARTMENT WITH ALL THE LIGHTS AND APPLIANCES GOING FULL BLAST.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THIS EPISODE?

WELL--I WAS A PHILOSOPHY MAJOR IN COLLEGE, DOCTOR. ACCORDING TO "TIMAEUS", ONE OF PLATO'S FINAL DIALOGUES, THE DEMIURGE PROVIDED MANKIND WITH A NECK TO SERVE AS A BIOLOGICAL ISTHMUS--
--SEPARATING THE HEAD, THE HOUSE OF THE HIGHER SOUL, FROM THE BODY OF OUR ANIMAL PASSIONS AND APPETITES.

WHAT JANEY'S GHOST MADE ME REALISE IS THAT THERE MUST BE CERTAIN STIMULI--ENCOUNTERS NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR EVEN THE SAFEST AMONG US-- WHICH CAUSE OUR SIGNALS TO CROSS AND, IN THE CONFUSION, THE BODY THINKS IT'S EXPERIENCING ENLIGHTENMENT WHILE THE BRAIN FEELS A RUSH LIKE PHYSICAL LIBERATION;
...WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES UNEXPECTEDLY SEIZED BY A BELIEF THAT DEMANDS WE SACRIFICE THE ONLY REAL LOVE WE KNOW, OR PERHAPS BY A DESIRE THAT MAKES A SUDDEN SHAMBLES OF OUR FAITH;
...A CONDITION THAT OBLITERATES ALL SELF-KNOWLEDGE, REDUCING US FINALLY TO OUR OPPOSING COMPONENTS;

...A DIVIDED BODY WHOSE SINGLE SKIN IS SUSTAINED, FROM THAT MOMENT ON, IN A STATE OF BEING PULLED VIOLENTLY IN TWO.
BUT IT NEVER TEARS, IT JUST STRANDS US IN THIS IN-BETWEEN HELL, THIS DISASTER AREA.

IN THE DRAMA OF OUR BODIES, THE NECK--THE TISSUE OF BOTH, THE TORMENT OF BOTH--IS THE DISASTER AREA.

THIS IS DR. DE FREITAS. SHE CONSULTS THESE PEOPLE, BUT SHE THINKS OF THEM AS "HEMOS".

IF MR. HERM WERE GRANTED THREE WISHES, HE WOULD VERY LIKELY GET HIMSELF ARRESTED BY THE FIRST PASSING VICE SQUAD.

revenge

STORY/ART © MATT HOWARTH

IF LITTLE TED WERE OFFERED THREE WISHES, **HE** WOULD JUST ASK FOR A HOME... TO BE LOVED AND TO BE FED.

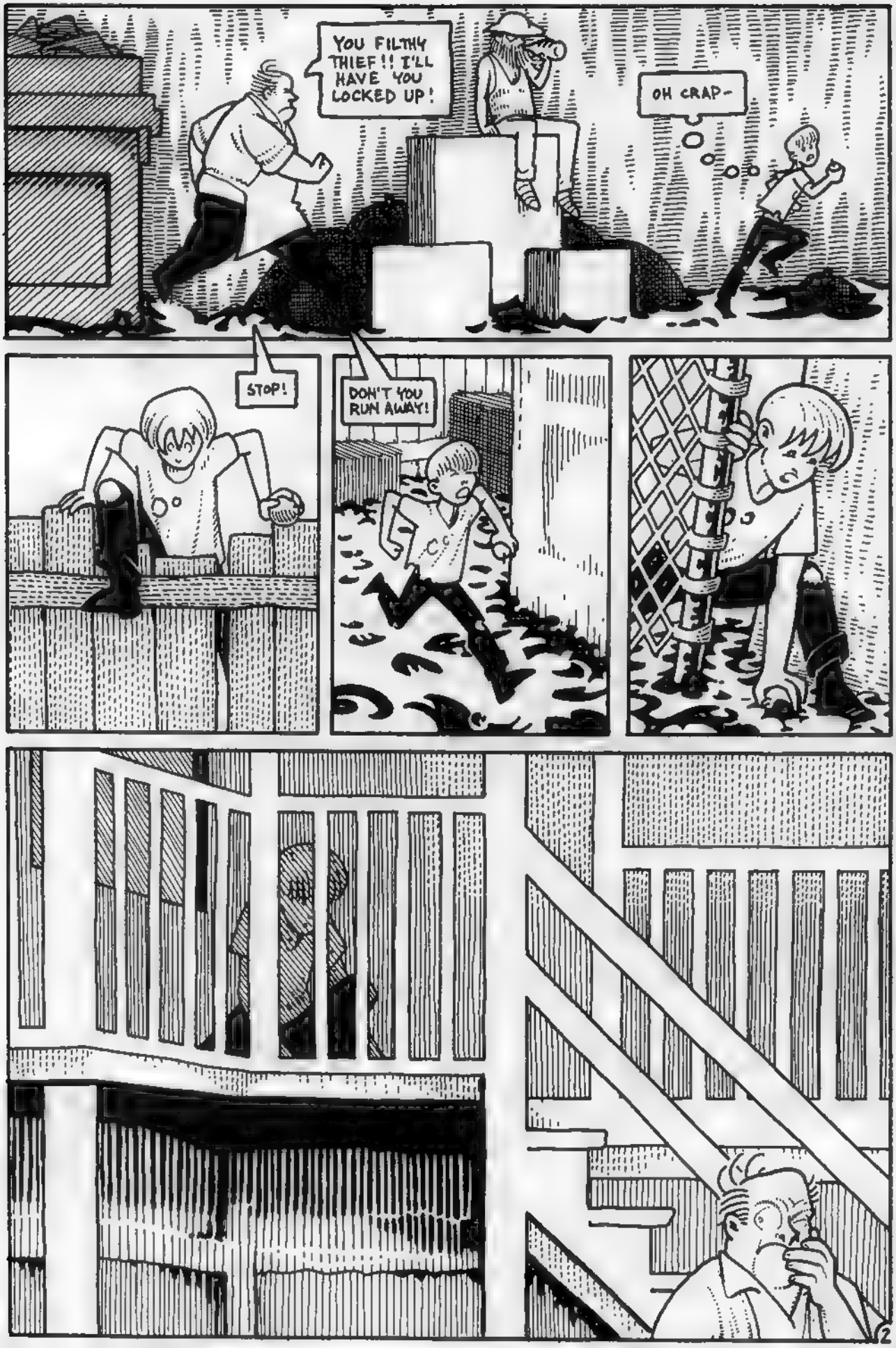
GLUG.

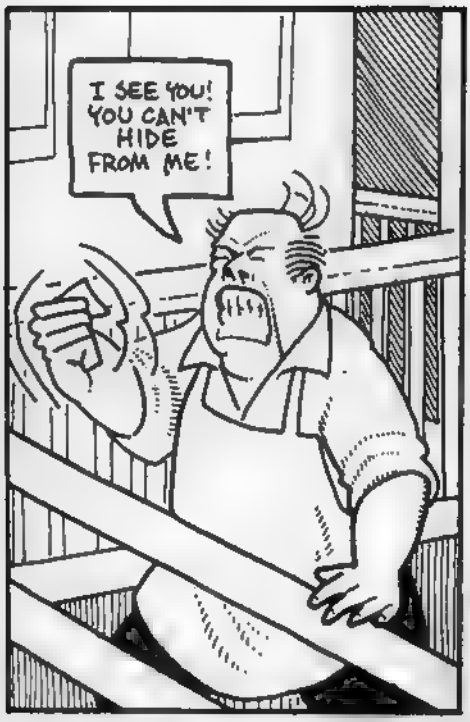
HUNGER IS A TERRIBLE THING.

SOME PEOPLE EVEN THINK IT IS FAR WORSE THAN GREED.

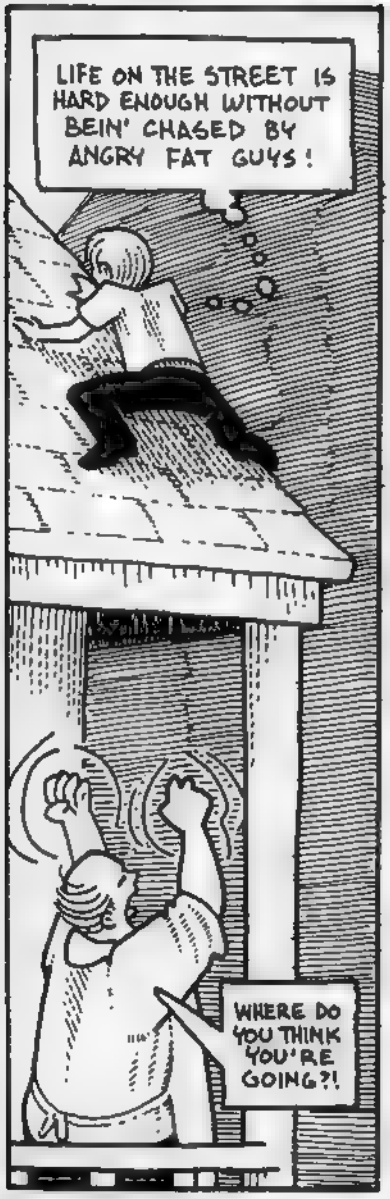
!

HEY YOU! COME BACK HERE, BOY!

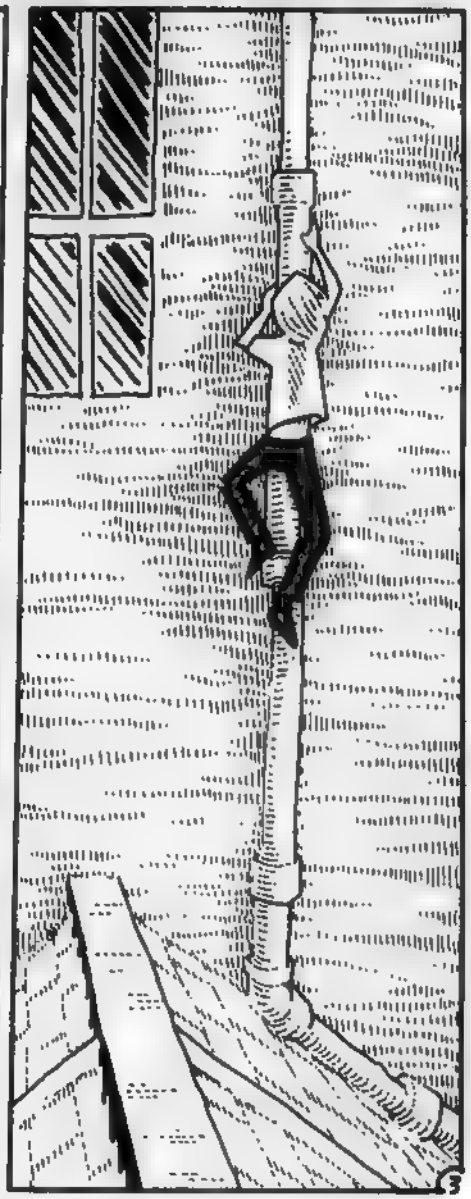

YOU FILTHY THIEF!! I'LL HAVE YOU LOCKED UP!
OH CRAP-
STOP!
DON'T YOU RUN AWAY!

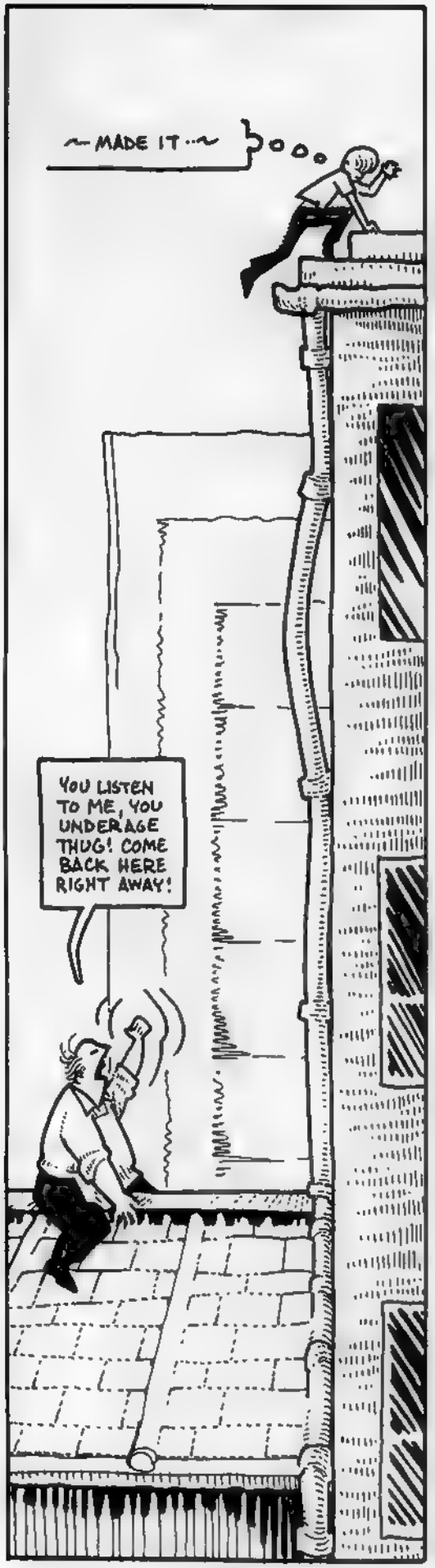

I SEE YOU! YOU CAN'T HIDE FROM ME!

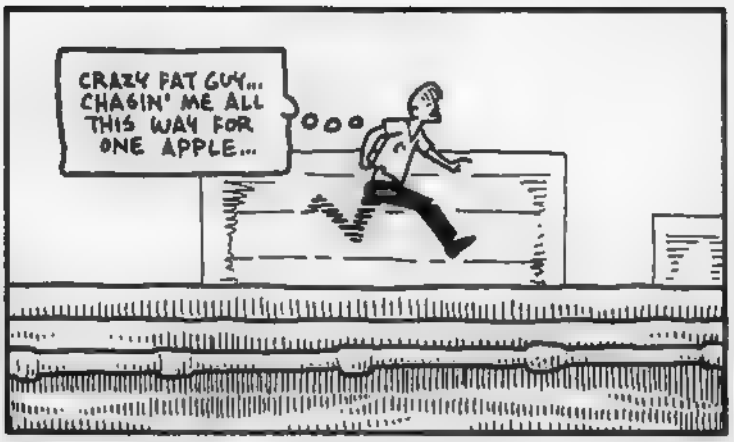
NOBODY STEALS FROM ME!
IS THIS GUY FOR REAL OR WHAT?


LIFE ON THE STREET IS HARD ENOUGH WITHOUT BEIN' CHASED BY ANGRY FAT GUYS!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?!

CAREFUL...
CAREFUL...
YOU COME BACK HERE!

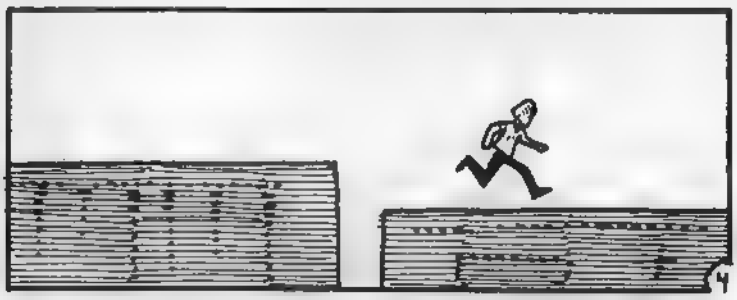


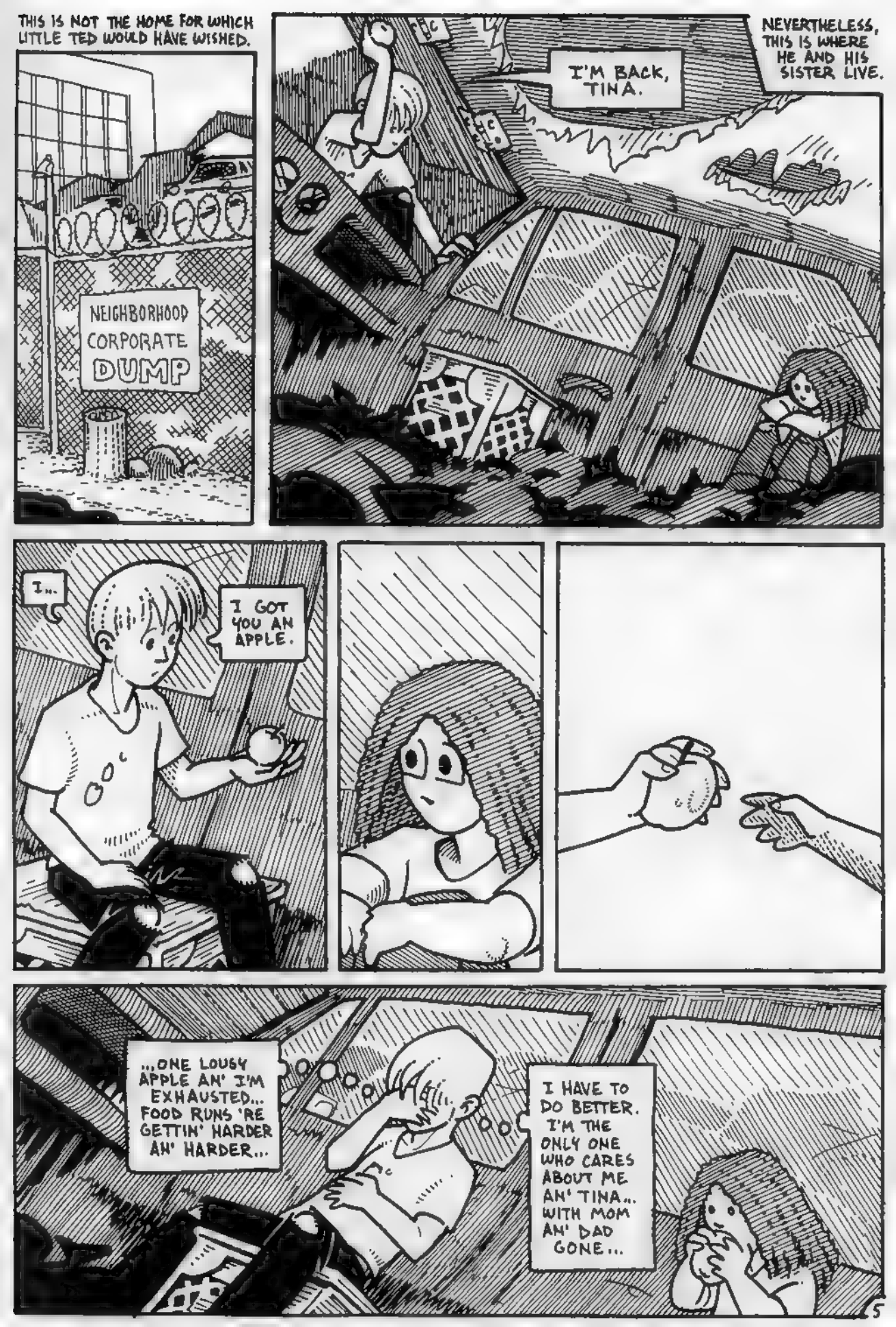

~MADE IT...~
YOU LISTEN TO ME, YOU UNDERAGE THUG! COME BACK HERE RIGHT AWAY!


CRAZY FAT GUY... CHASIN' ME ALL THIS WAY FOR ONE APPLE...

DON'T PRETEND YOU DON'T HEAR ME, YOU PUNK!
I'M GONNA CATCH YOU AND I'M GONNA TURN YOU IN TO THE POLICE!

YOU'LL DO HARD TIME, YOU FILTHY —
URK!
SWEET JESUS...
WHAT AM I DOING ALL THE WAY UP HERE? HOW... HOW'LL I GET DOWN?



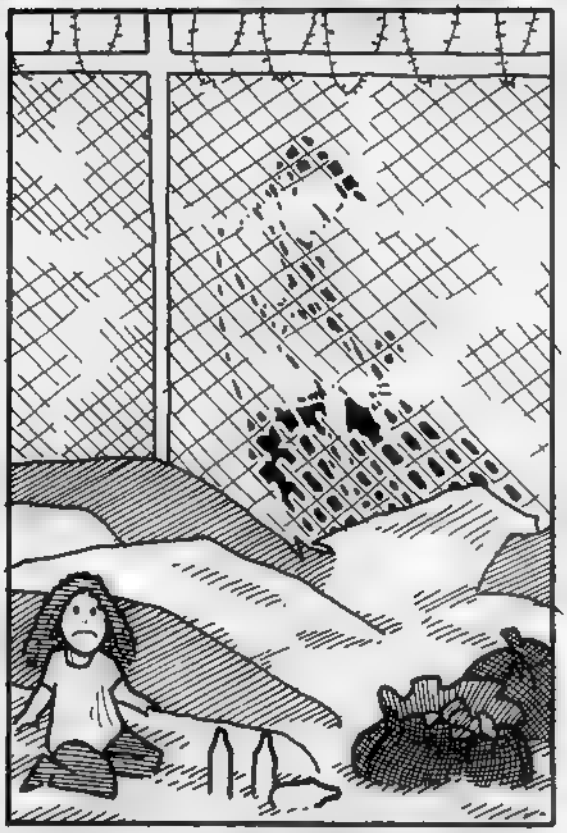

THIS IS NOT THE HOME FOR WHICH LITTLE TED WOULD HAVE WISHED.
NEIGHBORHOOD CORPORATE DUMP
I'M BACK, TINA.
NEVERTHELESS, THIS IS WHERE HE AND HIS SISTER LIVE.
I...
I GOT YOU AN APPLE.
...ONE LOUSY APPLE AN' I'M EXHAUSTED... FOOD RUNS 'RE GETTIN' HARDER AN' HARDER...
I HAVE TO DO BETTER. I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CARES ABOUT ME AN' TINA... WITH MOM AN' DAD GONE...

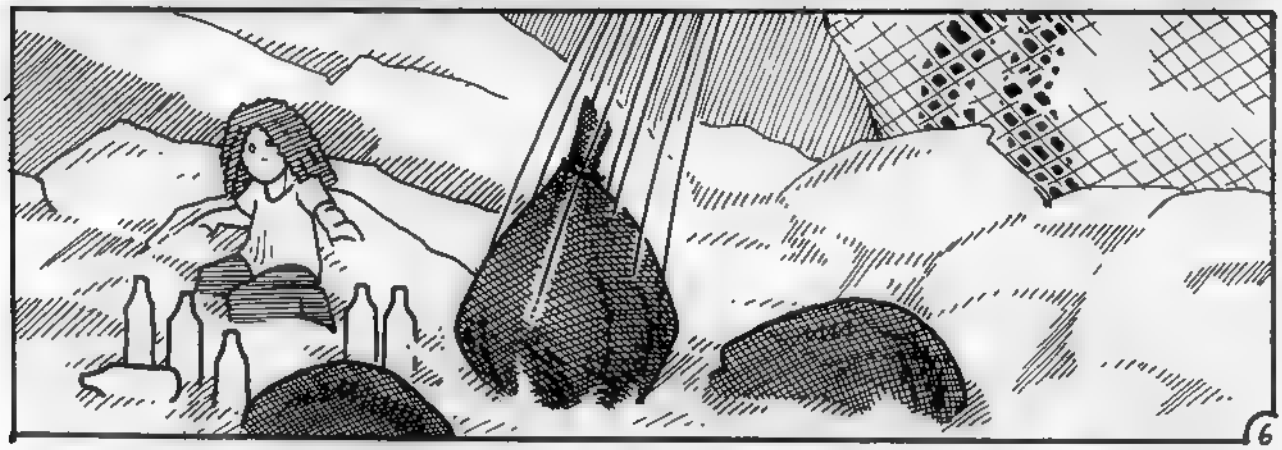
WE CAN'T SHOW UP AT ANY OF THE "SOUP KITCHENS", OR THEY'LL TRY AN' PUT US IN SOME CHILD WELFARE HOUSE... AN' THE OLDER STREETERS HAVE ALL THE GOOD DUMPSTERS...
TEDDY...?

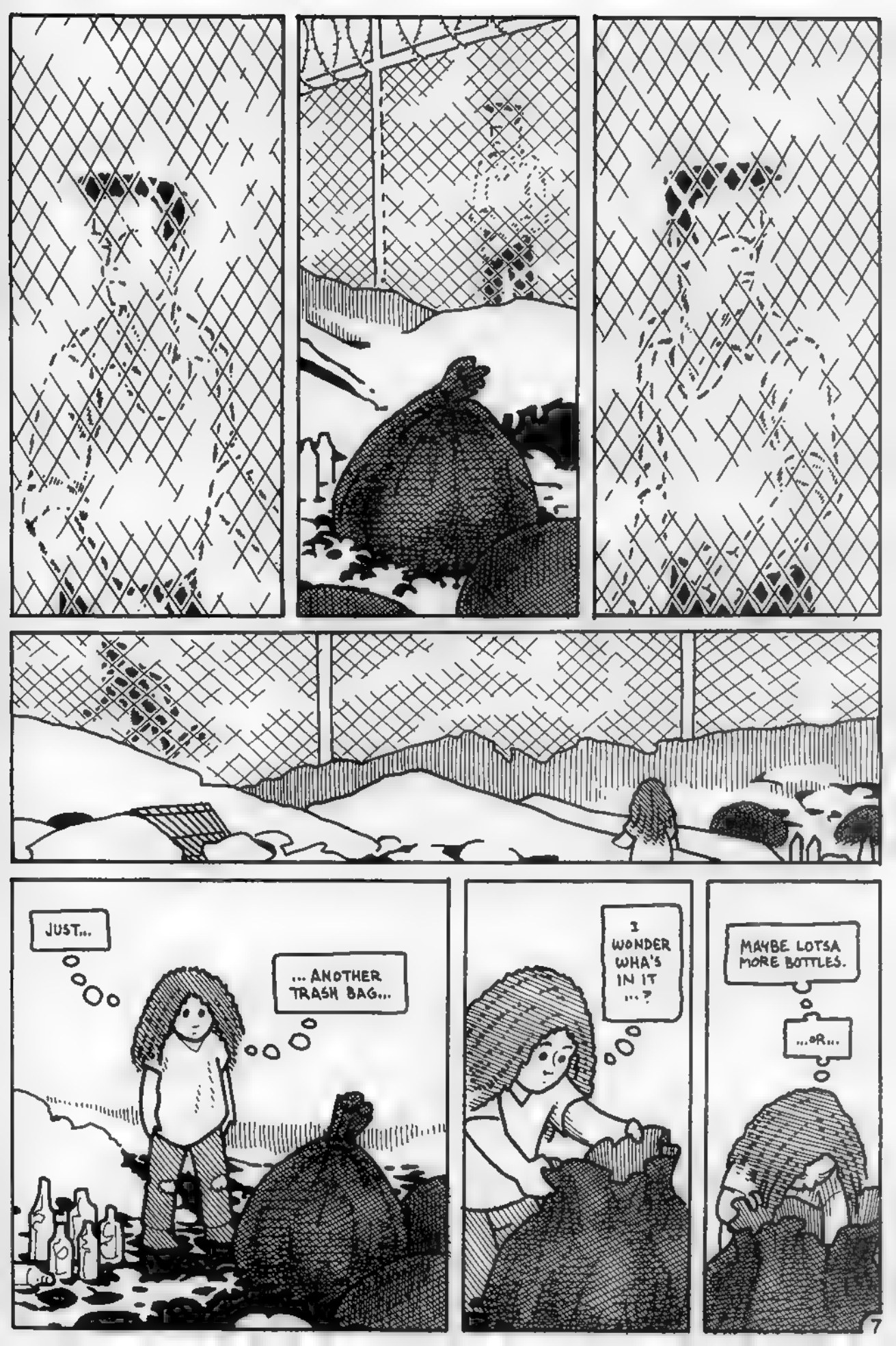
HUH?
OH... THANK YOU, TINA. I GUESS WE'RE DOIN' OKAY, HUH? WE MAY BE HOMELESS AN' HUNGRY, BUT WE'RE SURVIVIN', HUH?
SO FAR...
WE TAKE CARE'A EACH OTHER...

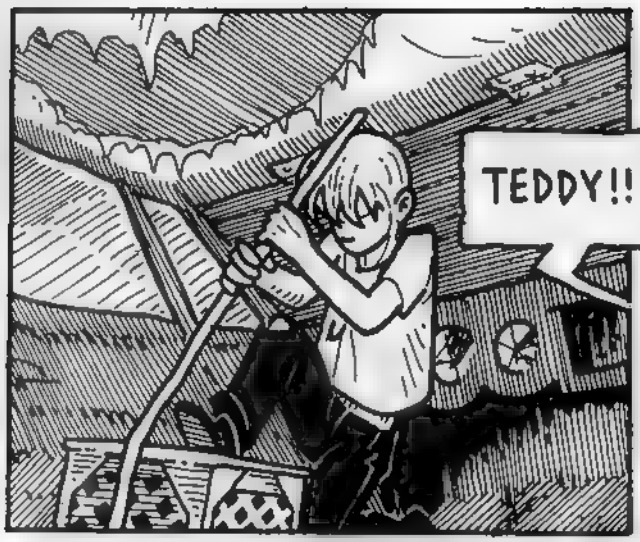
...FOUR... FIVE... THIS BAG'S GOT LOTSA BOTTLES IN IT...

EEP!
SOMEONE COMIN'—






JUST...
... ANOTHER TRASH BAG...
I WONDER WHA'S IN IT ...?
MAYBE LOTSA MORE BOTTLES.
...OR...


TEDDY!!!

TINA, WHERE ARE YOU?
TINA! OH NO!

TINA!
WHA'S WRONG? WHY'D YOU—
A BOOK, TEDDY! A BOOK! I FOUND A BOOK IN A TRASH BAG — LOOK! LOOK LOOK!!

NOT BEIN' RAPED
... A BOOK...
NOBODY MURDERIN' HER ...
SHE'S SAFE
WHEW.

"MY REVENGE"... FUNNY TITLE...
YES, TINA. IT'S A BOOK... SORTA...
READ IT TO ME, OH PLEASE !!!!!

PLEASE PLEASE
PLEASE
OH PLEASE READ ME THE BOOK!
DOES IT HAVE PICTURES?
OKAY, OKAY... LEMME FIND A GOOD PART...

when the BLOOD feels so good running through my fingers ... and I know what it's like once agai to snuff a human life out of existence ... DEAD ... REMOVED ... GONE! The thrill of it all mak me all tingly — like there's a current of electricity running wild through my body.

The satisfaction is growing with each new kill too. It's as if I'm increasing my RELEASE and fulfillment every time I add to my Hill of tiny skulls.

I have many ways as yet untried ... I cannot wait to put them to the test. My mind is full of new and inventive ways of dispatching my next victim (what a quaint way of saying it) = KILL

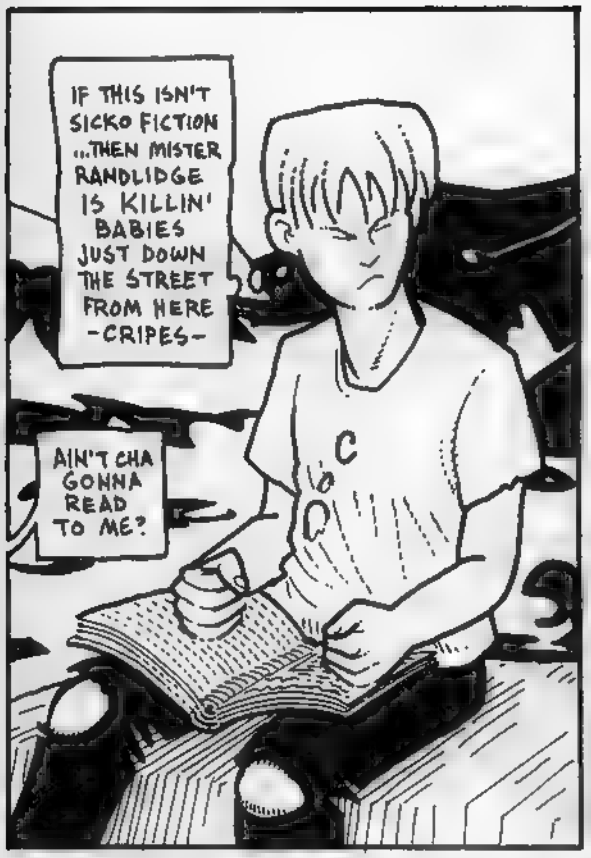
KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL HURT PAIN KILL KILL do it by it Killing! I Love to do it!! Call it by its real name — REVENGE!

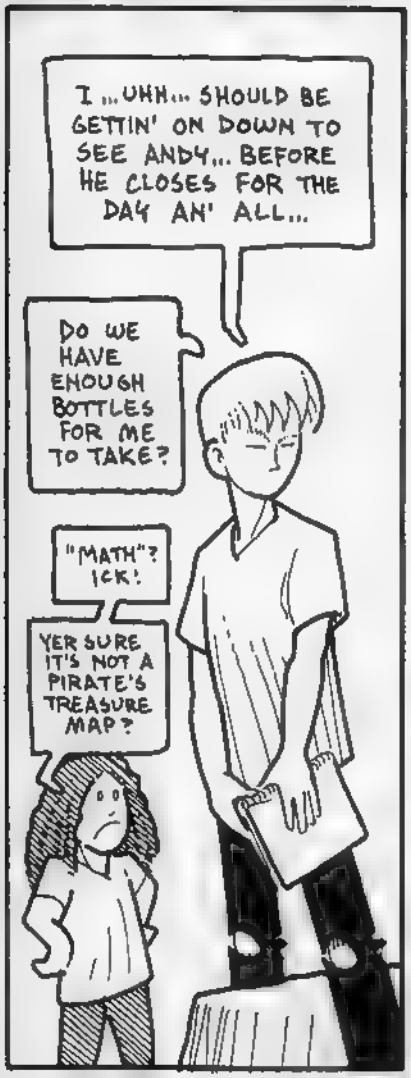
GAKK-

C'MON, TEDDY!

READ ME THE BOOK I FOUND!

They mustn't be too old. BABIES are the best for my purposes. I am too impatient to wait for them to grow up — and, I must admit — I have grown to enjoy their tiny screams and that pathetic pleading look they have as they die ... too young to understand dying, but perfectly capable of suffering an agonizing "dispatch". BABIES are just right.



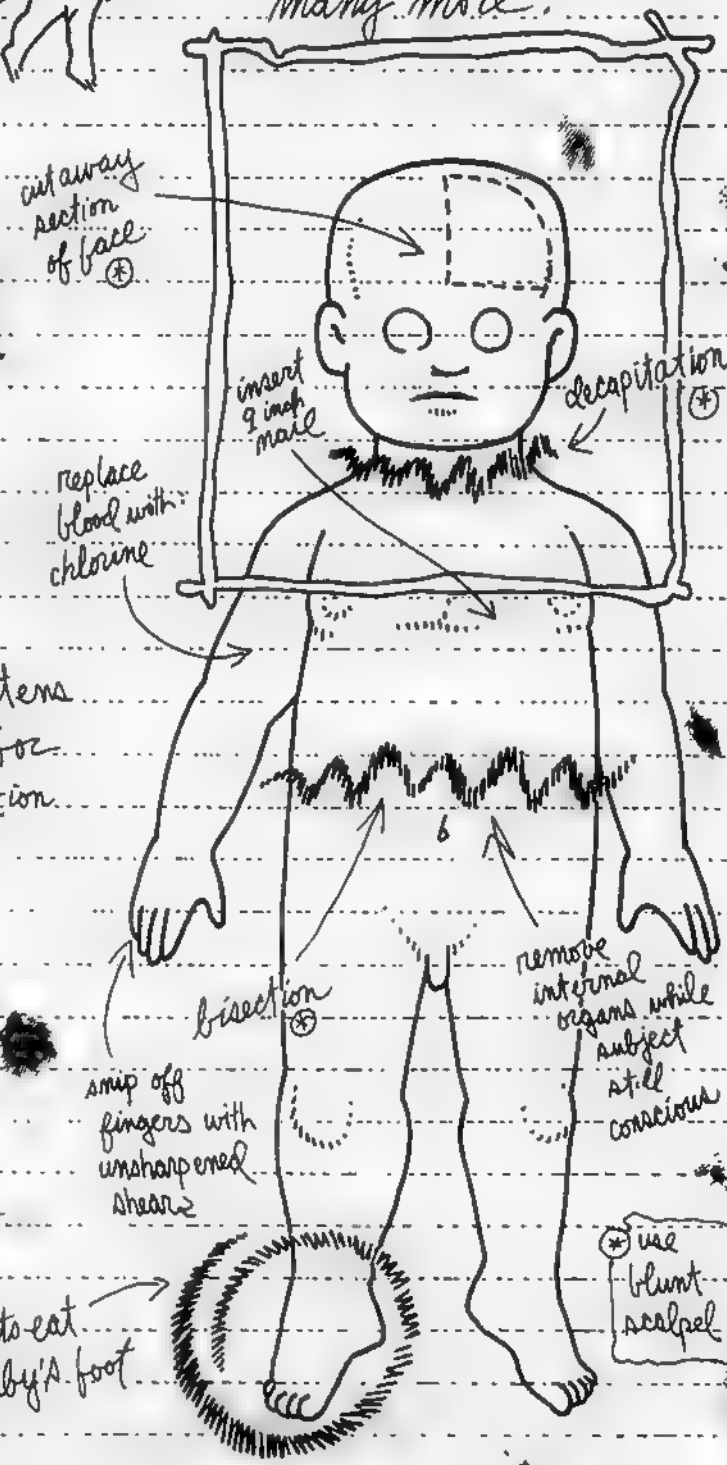


MONEY IS A NECESSITY EVEN FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ON THE STREET. THERE ARE JOBS TO BE FOUND, MOSTLY THROUGH COOPERATION WITH VARIOUS TEMP SERVICES. HOMELESS CHILDREN KNOW TO STEER CLEAR OF THESE AVENUES OF EMPLOYMENT, THOUGH, UNLESS THEY DESIRE TO BE SNATCHED AWAY FROM THEIR SELF-MADE LIVES AND FIND THEMSELVES UNWILLING WARDS IN A USELESS STATE HOME. THIS IS THE FATE THAT LITTLE TED MOST FEARS. HE HAS HAD TO FIND OTHER MEANS OF INCOME.

HEY, TED. HOW'S IT GOIN'? YOU HERE WITH MORE CANS? OR IS IT GLASS THIS TIME?
AT LEAST YOU DON'T BRING IN NEWSPAPERS. MAN, LOOKIT THESE STACKS I GOT STUCK WITH.
YOU DON'T PAY FOR PAPER.
NOW I KNOW WHY.
IT'S A DAMN SHAME TOO... WITH NOT ENOUGH PROCESSIN' PLANTS ON-LINE, WE'RE FORCED TO THROW MOST NEWSPAPERS WE GET OUT - FILLIN' DUMPS WITH GOOD RECYCLABLE PULP... SIGH.
YA KNOW THE REAL CRIME? IF THEY'D DECRIMINALIZE POT, THEY COULD GROW IT TO MAKE PAPER. ONE ACRE OF HEMP YIELDS AS MUCH PULP AS FOUR ACRES OF TREES, YA KNOW. BETTER STOCK TOO
THE SYSTEM IS SO MESSED UP.
I GOT BOTTLES THIS TIME, ANDY.
THE RULES SAY WE CAN'T BUY BOTTLES WITH THEIR LABELS REMOVED... BUT IT'S A STUPID RULE.
I'LL GIVE YOU A BUCK FOR THIS BATCH.
WHATEVER'S FAIR, ANDY.
I NEED YOUR HELP, ANDY. I'M AFRAID THAT THIS NOTEBOOK I FOUND IS... IMPORTANT. I... I DUNNO WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT... CAN YOU LOOK AT IT AN' ... UHH...
SURE, TED. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK IT'S IMPORTANT?
LOOK AT IT AN' ... AN' YOU'LL SEE.

I have killed 57 so far. 57 BABIES. 57 moments of ultimate ecstasy. 57 acts of vengeance.

I will kill many many more.



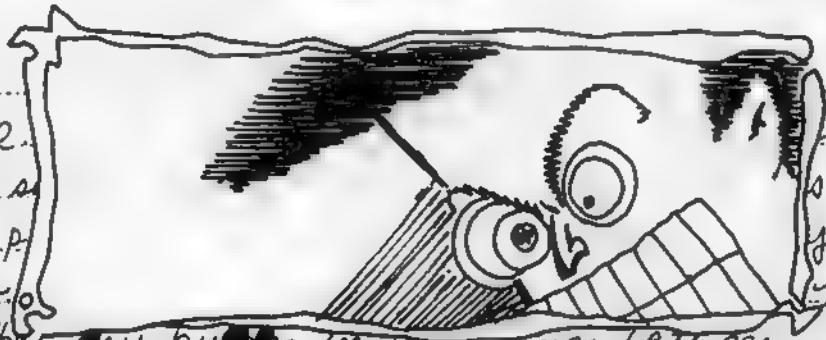
NOTES on ENHANCEMENT:

(7) give subject amyl nitrate popper before starting — heightens subject's senses for maximum perception of pain.

CARE and FEEDING:

(3) restock on glucose 314 solution and input tubing

don't forget to stop at hardware store for hammer on sat.



I have made
a tape of their s
screams to p
play for myself.
I find it soothes my hunger in those times between
victims. I like to listen to the tape before I to
sleep it h
ally good with headphones
to me.
eemed have misplaced
the skulls. I hat make
rch of the house. I
ant use any of my
the sofa
way
the refridgerator
value each one of
my own children
ould not decide
to c t of yesterday's
so put o in the
and other on e to
e was done first.
I tridy getting the most
of my kids? Isn't
there some way I can't enhance my perception of them?

NOTES on METHODOLOGIES:

(58)(59) feed live bees into oral / then anal orifice

(60) peel skin off in a spiral going from head to toe

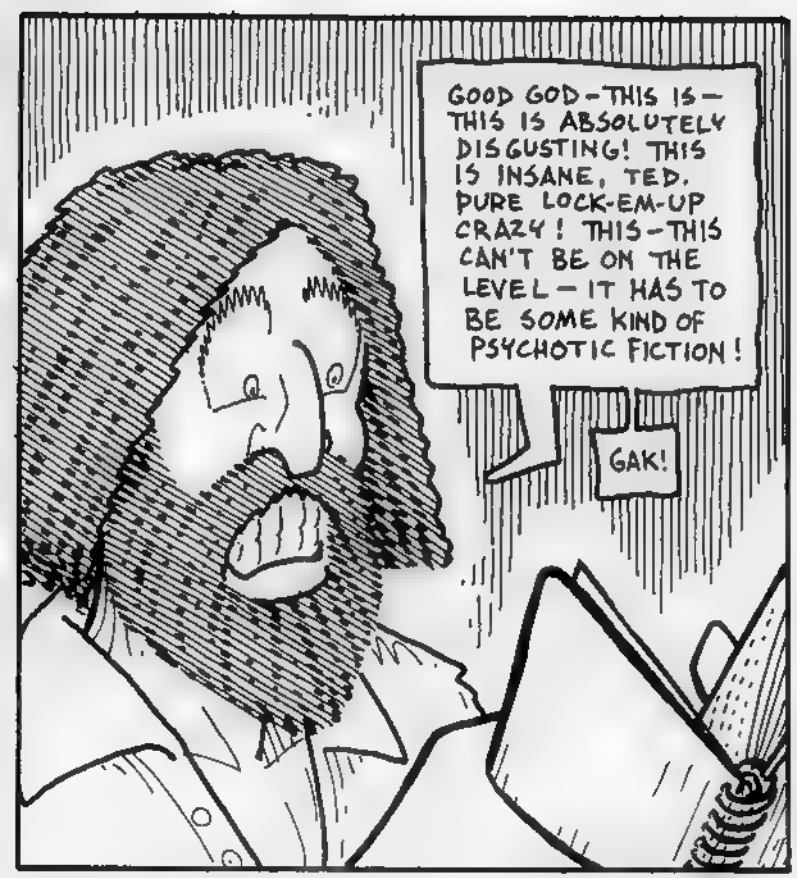
(61) inflate with air

(62) bury in lawn up to neck, then mow grass ... unfeasible ...

(62) drill holes in muscles with marshmallow coated powertool

(63) darts

(64) ~~bowling~~ — too public BUT check out other indoor sports options.



UGH! THE POLICE, TED. YOU HAVE TO TAKE THIS AN' SHOW IT TO THE POLICE.

GET REAL, ANDY.

I CAN'T GO TO THE COPS. I'M A HOMELESS KID. THEY WOULDN'T BELIEVE ANYTHING I TOLD THEM. THEY'D SEND ME OFF TO SOME STATE WELFARE HOME FOR CHILDREN.

IF THIS IS REAL, WE GOTTA FIND A WAY TO STOP MR. RANDLIDGE FROM KILLIN' MORE BABIES.

IT'S HIS NOTEBOOK - THE GUY WHO LIVES DOWN ON O'HENRY STREET.

SHIT... MAN, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE HOMELESS, TED...

BUT – WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THIS NOTEBOOK?

WAIT – I THINK ONE OF MY OL' BUDDIES FROM BACK IN 'NAM IS A COP NOW... YEAH, HATCH... CLARK HATCH – SURE. I COULD SHOW HIM THE NOTEBOOK. HE'D KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

THANKS, ANDY.

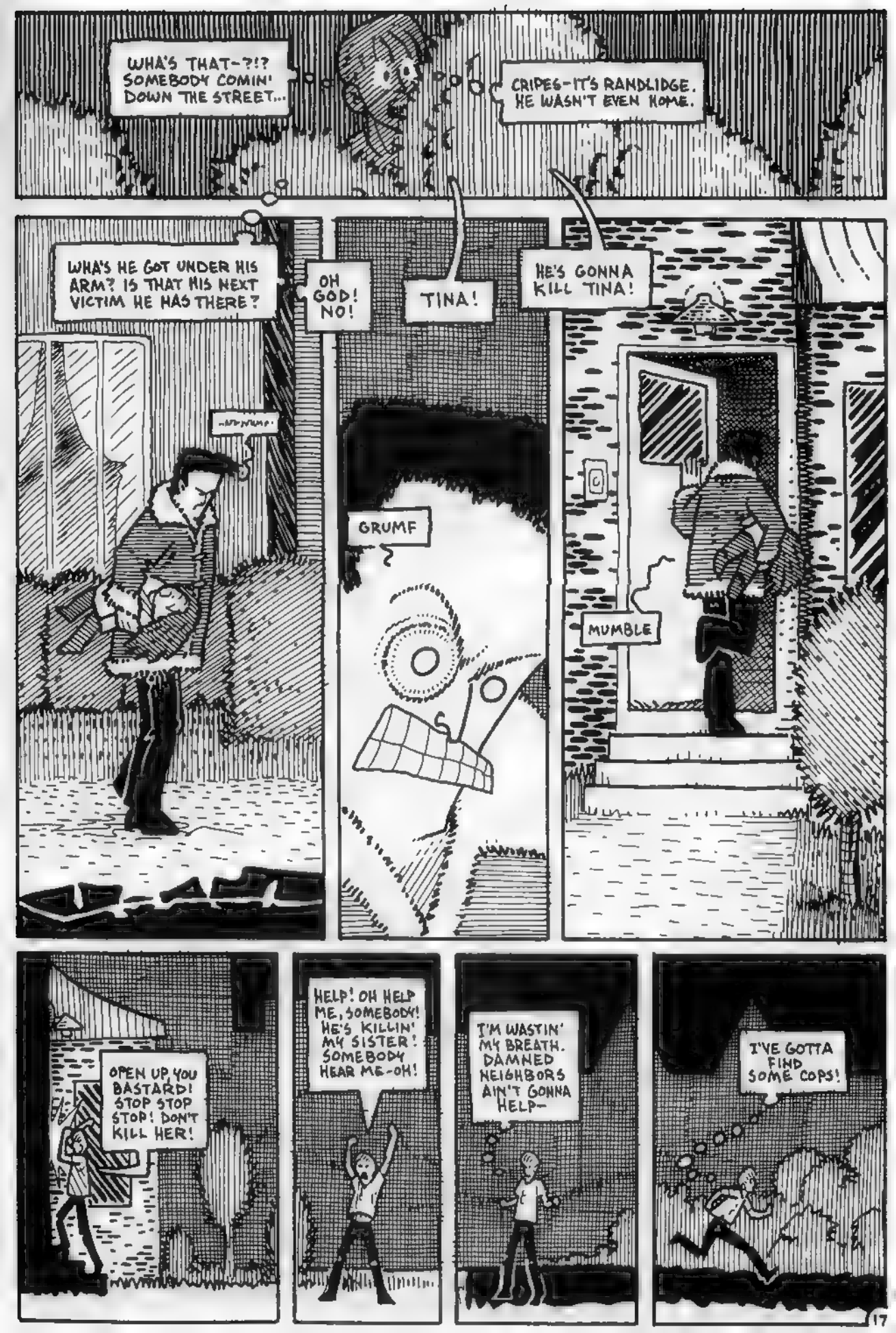
REALLY.

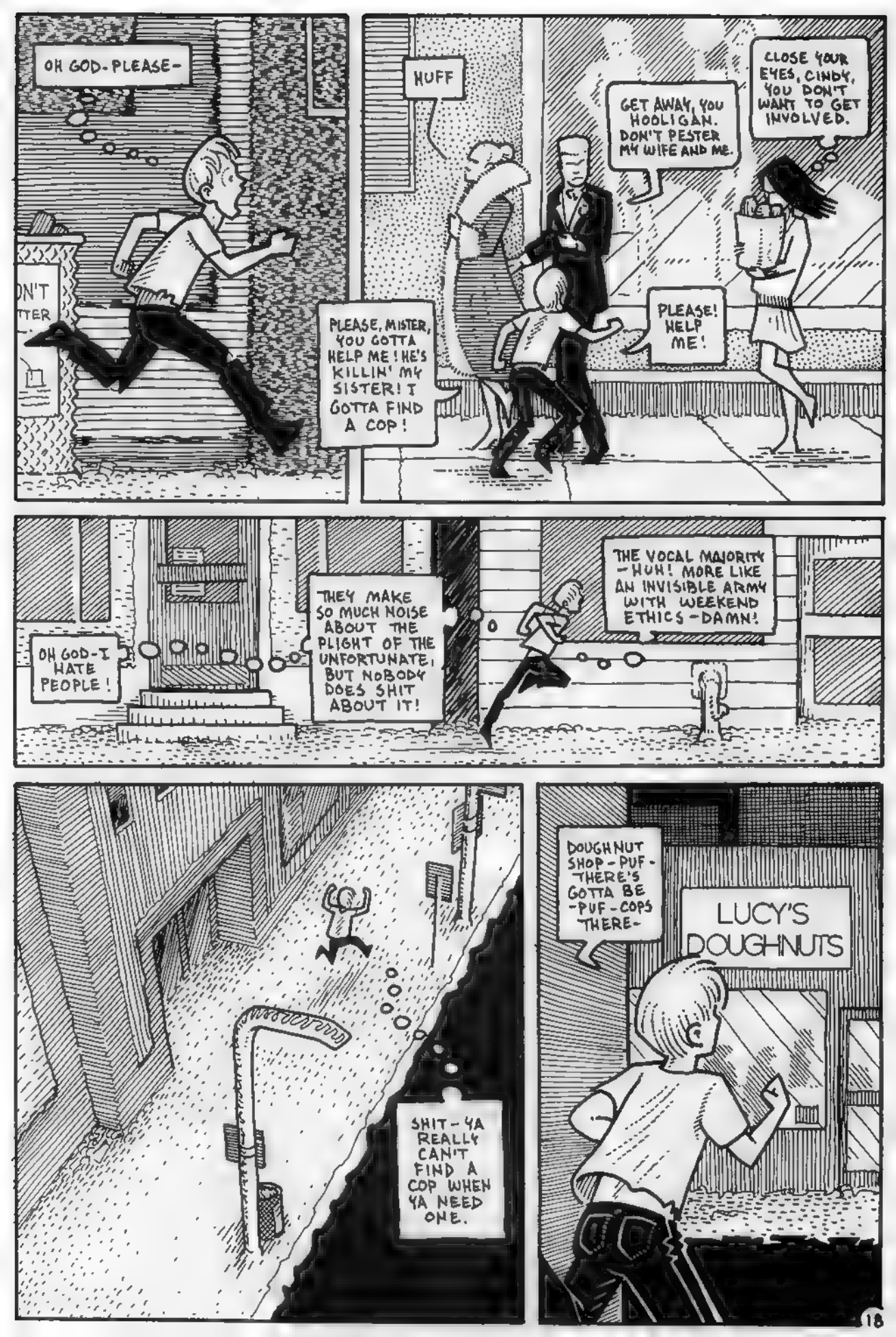
MUCH LATER THAT NIGHT...

WHY AM I WATCHIN' RANDLIDGE'S HOUSE ALL NIGHT?

DON'T I BELIEVE THAT ANDY'LL TELL THE COPS?

OR IS IT THAT I WANNA SEE THEM BUST RANDLIDGE?


WHA'S THAT-?!? SOMEBODY COMIN' DOWN THE STREET...
CRIPES-IT'S RANDLIDGE. HE WASN'T EVEN HOME.
WHA'S HE GOT UNDER HIS ARM? IS THAT HIS NEXT VICTIM HE HAS THERE?
OH GOD! NO!
TINA!
HE'S GONNA KILL TINA!
GRUMF
MUMBLE
OPEN UP, YOU BASTARD! STOP STOP STOP! DON'T KILL HER!
HELP! OH HELP ME, SOMEBODY! HE'S KILLIN' MY SISTER! SOMEBODY HEAR ME-OH!
I'M WASTIN' MY BREATH. DAMNED NEIGHBORS AIN'T GONNA HELP-
I'VE GOTTA FIND SOME COPS!

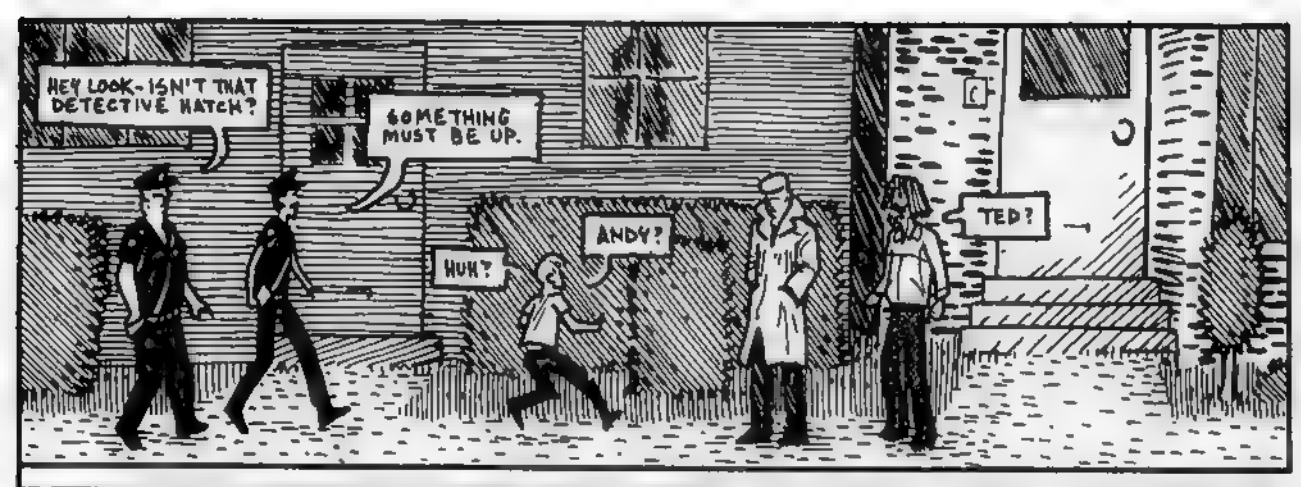

OH GOD-PLEASE-
PLEASE, MISTER, YOU GOTTA HELP ME! HE'S KILLIN' MY SISTER! I GOTTA FIND A COP!
HUFF
GET AWAY, YOU HOOLIGAN. DON'T PESTER MY WIFE AND ME.
CLOSE YOUR EYES, CINDY, YOU DON'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED.
PLEASE! HELP ME!
OH GOD-I HATE PEOPLE!
THEY MAKE SO MUCH NOISE ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF THE UNFORTUNATE, BUT NOBODY DOES SHIT ABOUT IT!
THE VOCAL MAJORITY -HUH! MORE LIKE AN INVISIBLE ARMY WITH WEEKEND ETHICS -DAMN!
SHIT-YA REALLY CAN'T FIND A COP WHEN YA NEED ONE.
DOUGHNUT SHOP-PUF-THERE'S GOTTA BE -PUF-COPS THERE-
LUCY'S DOUGHNUTS

HELP! HELP!

GIMME A REFILL, DOLL.
HE'S GONNA KILL MY SISTER! YA GOTTA COME STOP HIM, PLEASE!
PLEASE PLEASE!

HUMPH, WE JUST SAT DOWN TO EAT.
FER CRYIN' OUT LOUD, KID, WILL YA QUIET DOWN? WHAT'S THE PROBLEM NOW, EH? WHO'S GOIN' TO KILL WHO?
IS THIS SOME KIND OF JOKE?
OH, GROSS-KILLING! ICK! PEOPLE DON'T REALLY KILL OTHER PEOPLE, DO THEY?
THIS IS FOR REAL!! PLEASE-HE'S GONNA KILL HER-PLEASE!

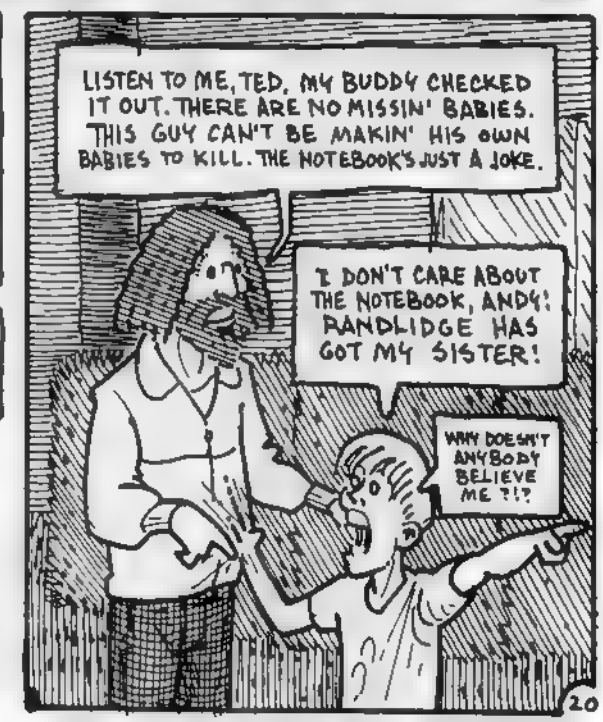
OKAY, KID, OKAY. SHOW US WHERE YOUR SISTER IS.
HE KILLS BABIES AN' NOW HE'S GONNA KILL MY SISTER TOO! YA GOTTA STOP HIM!


HEY LOOK-ISN'T THAT DETECTIVE HATCH?
SOMETHING MUST BE UP.
HUH?
ANDY?
TED?

IS THIS THE KID WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE FOUND THE NOTEBOOK, ANDY?
THAT'S HIM, CLARK.
WHAT'S HE DOIN' OUT SO LATE?
TED, WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' HERE?

WHAT BRINGS YOU TWO BLUES HERE?
WELL, SIR...
ANDY! HE'S GOT MY SISTER TINA! HE'S GONNA KILL HER JUST LIKE HE DID ALL THOSE BABIES!

-COMES RUNNING INTO THE DOUGHNUT SHOP, SCREAMING ABOUT HOW SOME GUY IS GONNA KILL HIS SISTER. SO WE CAME TO CHECK IT OUT.
WHA'S ALL THIS ABOUT "BABIES"?
THE KID HAS BABIES ON THE BRAIN.
YOU GOTTA STOP THIS, TED. THERE'RE NO DEAD BABIES, WHATEVER IT SAYS IN THAT NOTEBOOK. I SHOWED IT TO MY POLICE BUDDY AN' HE SAYS THAT IT'S JUST A JOKE. A BAD JOKE, TED.
NO NO NO! HE'S GOT TINA!


LISTEN TO ME, TED, MY BUDDY CHECKED IT OUT. THERE ARE NO MISSIN' BABIES. THIS GUY CAN'T BE MAKIN' HIS OWN BABIES TO KILL. THE NOTEBOOK'S JUST A JOKE.
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE NOTEBOOK, ANDY! RANDLIDGE HAS GOT MY SISTER!
WHY DOESN'T ANYBODY BELIEVE ME?!?

THIS KID ISN'T GOING TO STOP YELLING, IS HE, ANDY?
HE'S ALL UPSET ABOUT HIS SISTER...

OKAY... I CAME HERE ANYWAY TO ASK THIS GUY ABOUT HIS BAD TASTE IN JOKES WITH THAT SICKO NOTEBOOK...
LET'S GO ASK HIM ABOUT THIS KID'S MISSING SISTER TOO.

ANYTHING TO KEEP THE PEACE... THAT'S WHAT I'M PAID TO DO.
KID PROBABLY DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A SISTER.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT-OOP! WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, OFFICERS?
MR. RANDLIDGE? I'M DETECTIVE HATCH. I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT A PARTICULAR NOTEBOOK.
WE'D ALSO LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS BOY'S MISSING SISTER.
THA'S HIM! THA'S HIM!

I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ANY NOTEBOOK, OFFICERS.
BUT THE BOY'S SISTER ISN'T MISSING. SHE'S HERE WITH ME.

HERE SHE IS.

NICE WORK, HUH? I USED TO BE A DOCTOR.

UGH-

OH JEEZ-

-ACK-

TINA!!!

TINA TINA TINA TINA OH GOD NO TINA TINA!

MOTHER OF GOD - THE KID WASN'T FOOLIN' - HIS SISTER - (CHOKE) - DID GET KILLED - (GAG) -

AUG-

RETCH

AGGLE

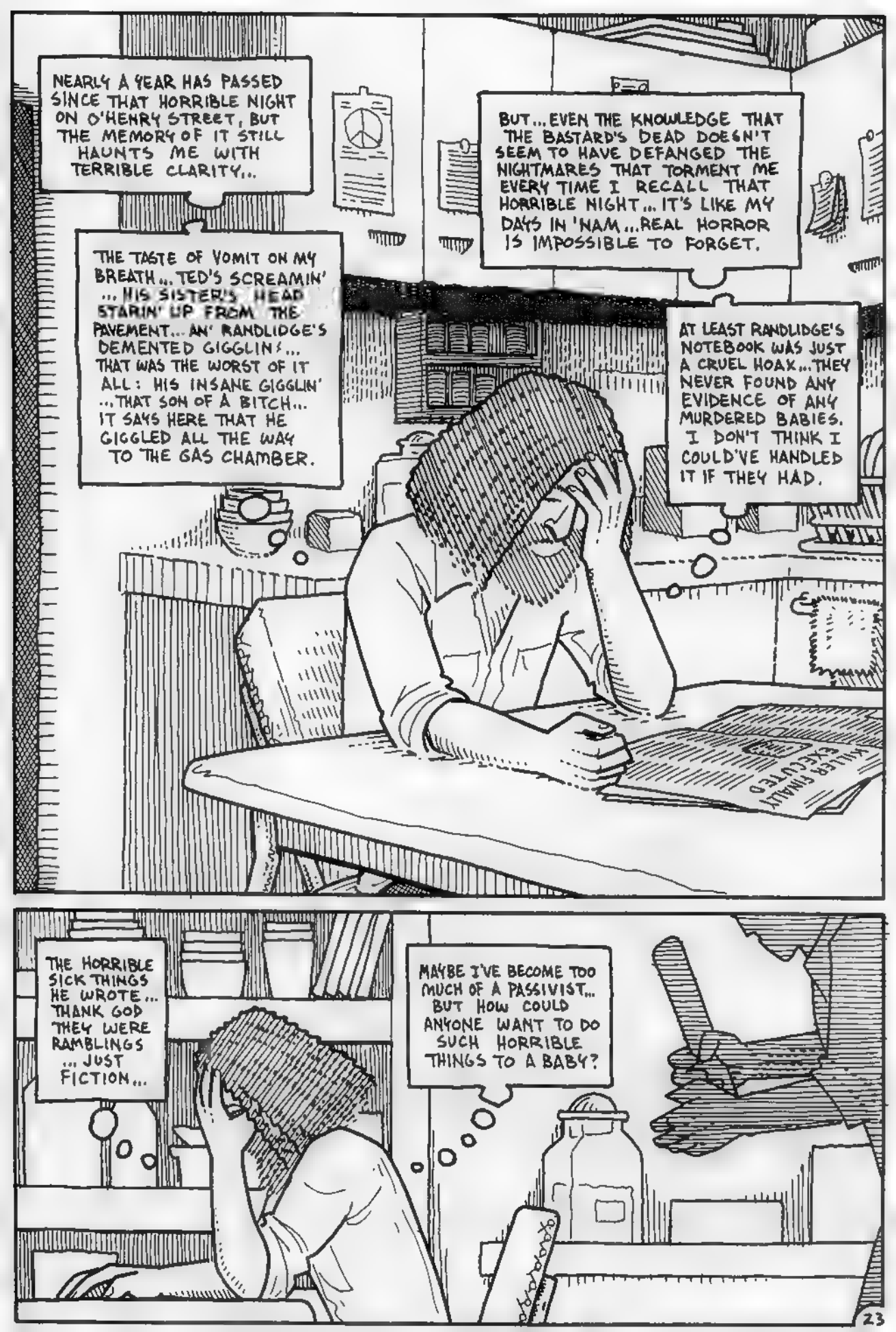
YOU'RE UNDER FUCKIN' ARREST, RANDLIDGE!

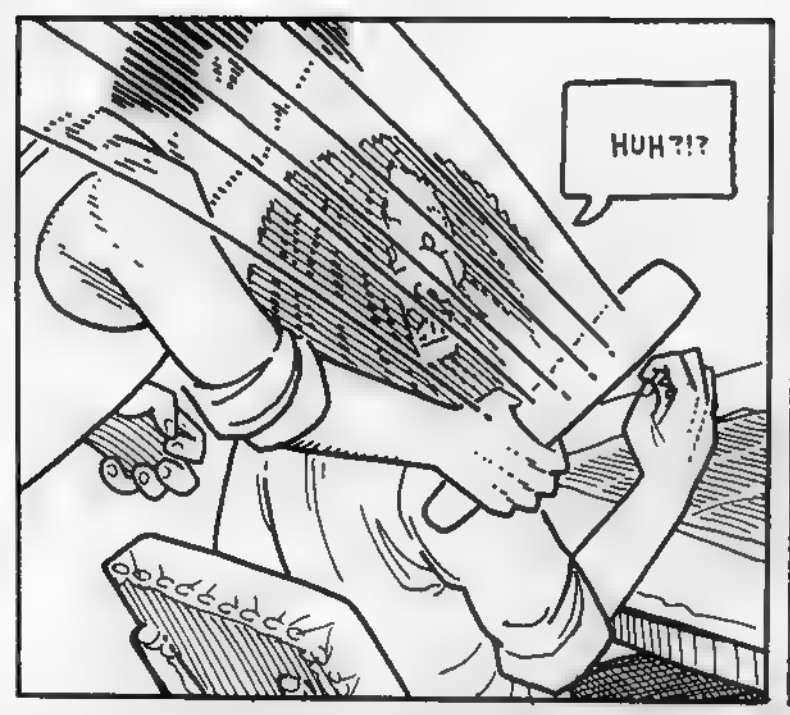
MOVE A NOSTRIL-HAIR, YOU BAG OF SHIT, AND I'LL BLOW YOUR BRAINS RIGHT OUT!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

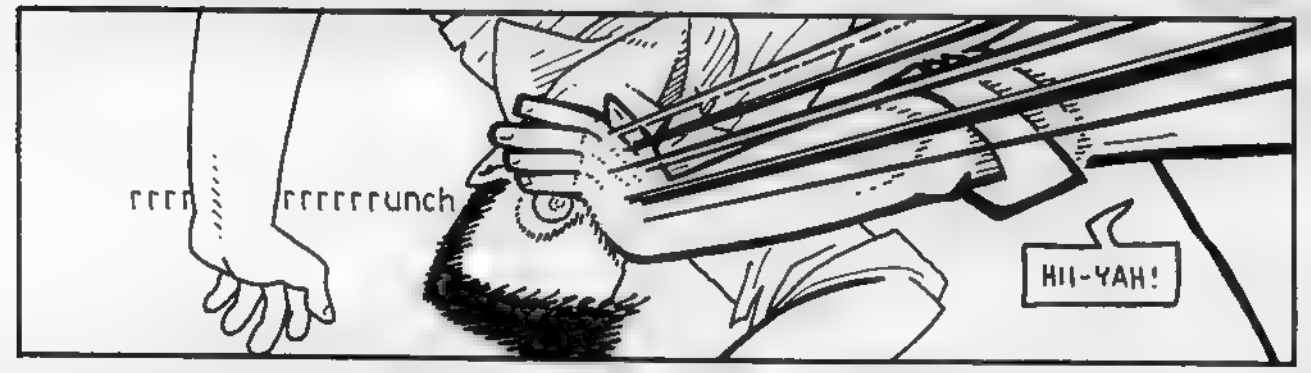
DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?

HEE HEE HEE HEE

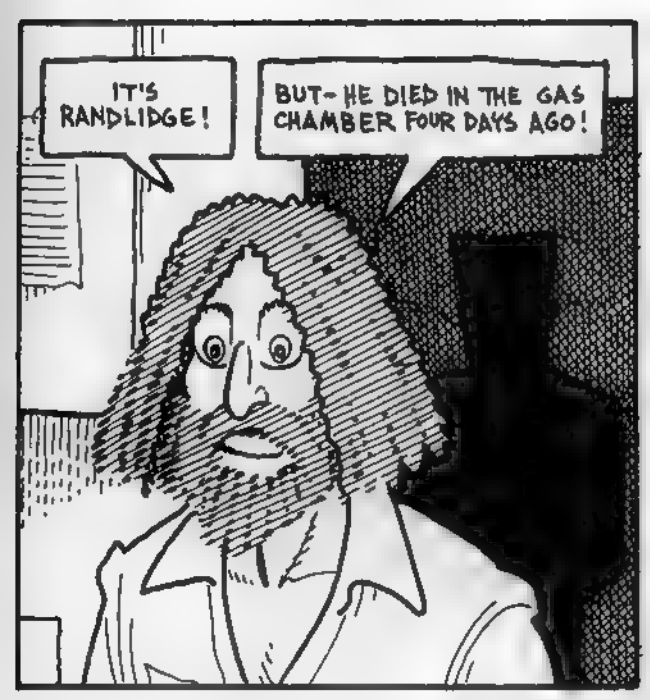

NEARLY A YEAR HAS PASSED SINCE THAT HORRIBLE NIGHT ON O'HENRY STREET, BUT THE MEMORY OF IT STILL HAUNTS ME WITH TERRIBLE CLARITY...
BUT... EVEN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE BASTARD'S DEAD DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE DEFANGED THE NIGHTMARES THAT TORMENT ME EVERY TIME I RECALL THAT HORRIBLE NIGHT... IT'S LIKE MY DAYS IN 'NAM... REAL HORROR IS IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET.
THE TASTE OF VOMIT ON MY BREATH... TED'S SCREAMIN' ... HIS SISTER'S HEAD STARIN' UP FROM THE PAVEMENT... AN' RANDLIDGE'S DEMENTED GIGGLIN'... THAT WAS THE WORST OF IT ALL: HIS INSANE GIGGLIN' ...THAT SON OF A BITCH... IT SAYS HERE THAT HE GIGGLED ALL THE WAY TO THE GAS CHAMBER.
AT LEAST RANDLIDGE'S NOTEBOOK WAS JUST A CRUEL HOAX... THEY NEVER FOUND ANY EVIDENCE OF ANY MURDERED BABIES. I DON'T THINK I COULD'VE HANDLED IT IF THEY HAD.
KILLER FINALLY EXECUTED
THE HORRIBLE SICK THINGS HE WROTE... THANK GOD THEY WERE RAMBLINGS ... JUST FICTION...
MAYBE I'VE BECOME TOO MUCH OF A PASSIVIST... BUT HOW COULD ANYONE WANT TO DO SUCH HORRIBLE THINGS TO A BABY?

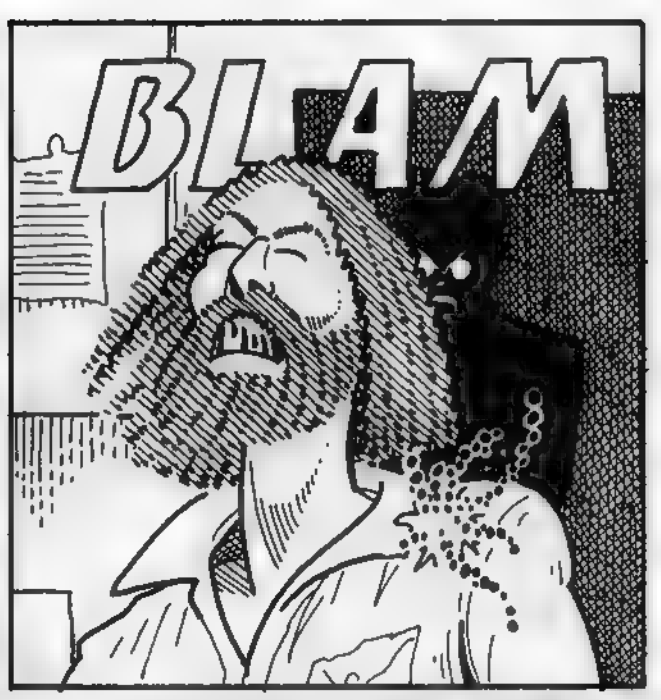

HUH?!?

A BURGLAR! YOU PICKED THE WRONG DUDE TO ROB, PAL!
HII-YUP!


rrrr
rrrrrrunch
HII-YAH!

I MAY CONSCIOUSLY BE A PASSIVIST, BUT ONCE A MAN'S HAD COMBAT TRAININ', SELF-DEFENSE IS A REFLEXIVE THIN'.
HUH?
DAMN!
IT'S -IT CAN'T BE — THIS ISN'T POSSIBLE-


IT'S RANDLIDGE!
BUT- HE DIED IN THE GAS CHAMBER FOUR DAYS AGO!


BLAM

WE'RE GLAD THAT YOU REMEMBER US. WE DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR NAME, BUT WE REMEMBER YOU!
OW-
YOU AND THOSE KIDS... WE ONLY HAD TIME TO KILL THE GIRL BEFORE YOU BROUGHT THE POLICE...
...TO OUR DOOR.

YOU FORCED US TO HAVE TO GIVE UP ONE OF OUR SELVES TO THE POLICE IN ORDER TO KEEP OUR SECRET AND TO BUY US THE TIME TO ESCAPE OUT THE BACK WITH THE REAL EVIDENCE.
EVEN THOUGH WE ARE ALL THE SAME PERSON, WE HATE TO LOSE ONE OF OUR SELVES. WE HATE IT INTENSELY... WE DESIRE REVENGE!
AND WE ARE EXPERTS AT REVENGE!
WHERE IS THE BOY?

"BOY"? I... I DUNNO WHAT YOU'RE TALKIN' ABOUT...

I MUST BE IN SHOCK FROM THIS WOUND... I SEE TWO OF YOU...

...BUT YOU'RE BOTH RANDLIDGE...

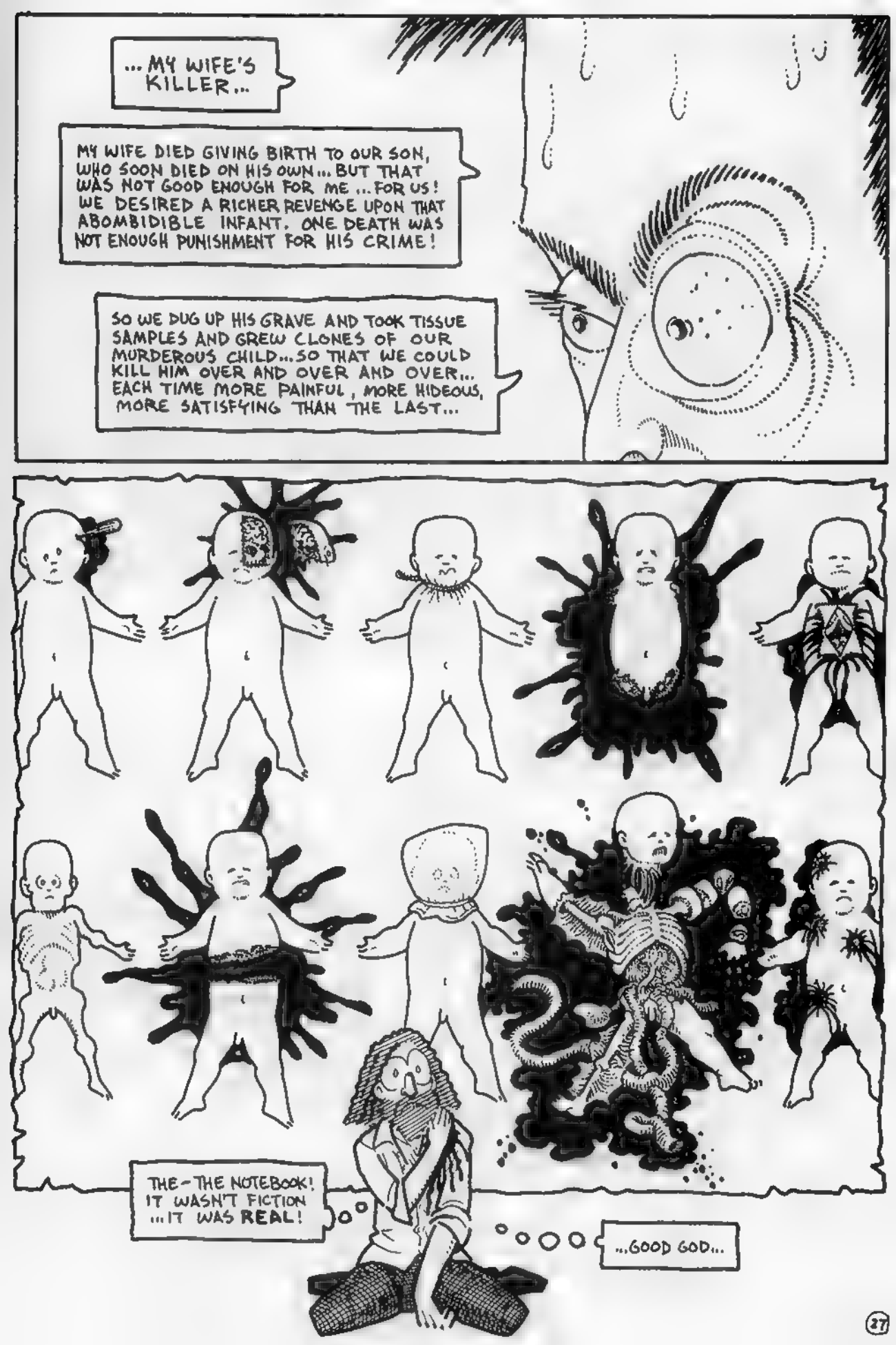
THERE USED TO BE FOUR OF US...BUT THEN YOU HELPED THE POLICE KILL ONE. NOW WE THREE ARE THE ONLY RANDLIDGES LEFT.

GENETICS, YOU PATHETIC MORON. COMPLEX GENETICS TECHNIQUES TO SOME, BUT CHILDISHLY SIMPLE TO ME. I'M A GENIUS, YOU KNOW. MY WORK IS CENTURIES AHEAD OF THAT OF THE BEST RESEARCH LABS — ADVANCED CELLULAR GROWTH, MEMORY IMPLANT, GLUCOSE NUTRITION RATIOS — AND I SHOULD KNOW, BECAUSE I USED TO WORK FOR THE BEST RESEARCH LAB...

...BEFORE MY WIFE WAS KILLED...

MY WIFE'S DEATH UTTERLY DESTROYED ME. MY WORK BECAME SLOPPY AND THE LAB FIRED ME SOON AFTER A... PARTICULARLY UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT. THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD DO WITHOUT ME. THEY THOUGHT I WAS ALL WASHED UP.

BUT I CONTINUED MY WORK ON MY OWN. I GREW CLONES OF MYSELF TO ASSIST ME IN THE TASK OF EXACTING REVENGE ON THE KILLER OF MY WIFE.


...MY WIFE'S KILLER...
MY WIFE DIED GIVING BIRTH TO OUR SON, WHO SOON DIED ON HIS OWN... BUT THAT WAS NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME ... FOR US! WE DESIRED A RICHER REVENGE UPON THAT ABOMBIDIBLE INFANT. ONE DEATH WAS NOT ENOUGH PUNISHMENT FOR HIS CRIME!
SO WE DUG UP HIS GRAVE AND TOOK TISSUE SAMPLES AND GREW CLONES OF OUR MURDEROUS CHILD... SO THAT WE COULD KILL HIM OVER AND OVER AND OVER... EACH TIME MORE PAINFUL, MORE HIDEOUS, MORE SATISFYING THAN THE LAST...
THE-THE NOTEBOOK! IT WASN'T FICTION ...IT WAS REAL!
...GOOD GOD...

THAT WAS OUR SECRET—SAFE FROM INTERFERENCE—UNTIL ONE OF OUR JOURNALS GOT ACCIDENTALLY THROWN OUT IN THE TRASH FOR YOU AND YOUR LITTLE RECYCLING KID FRIENDS TO FIND. AND YOU HAD TO LEAD THE POLICE RIGHT TO US, DIDN'T YOU? SUCH AN UPSTANDING, LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN—STICKING YOUR NOSE WHERE IT DOESN'T BELONG!

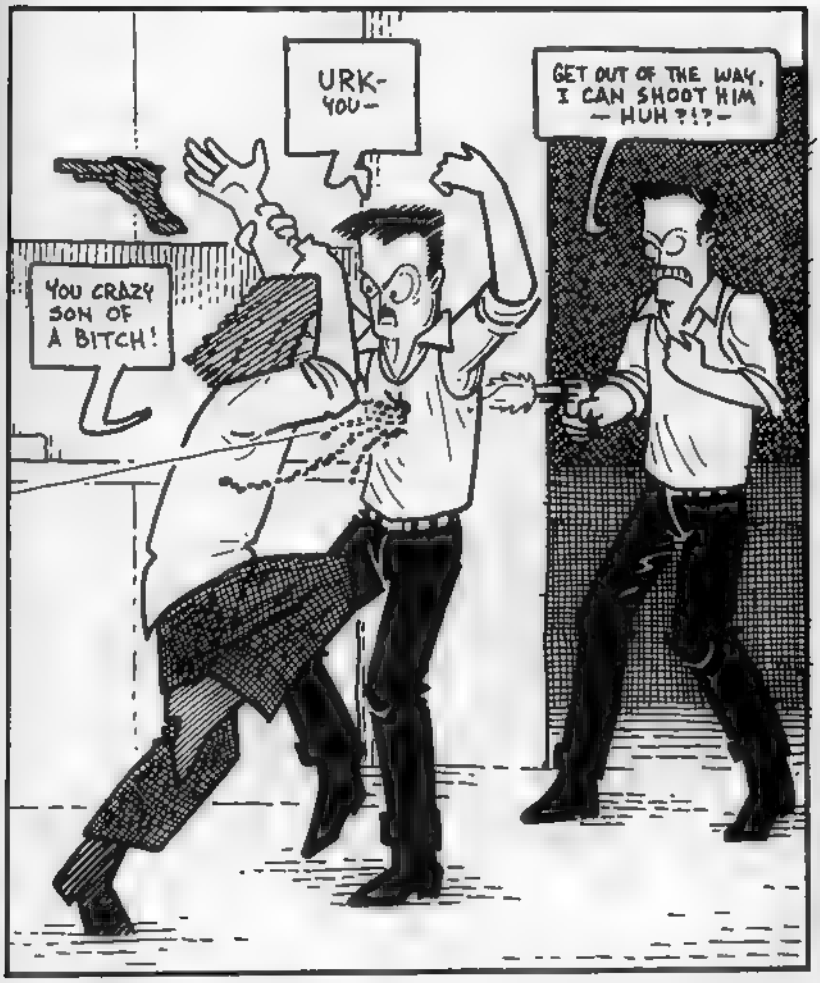
THAT REALLY PISSES US OFF !!!

DON'T KILL HIM UNTIL WE FIND OUT WHERE THE KID IS.

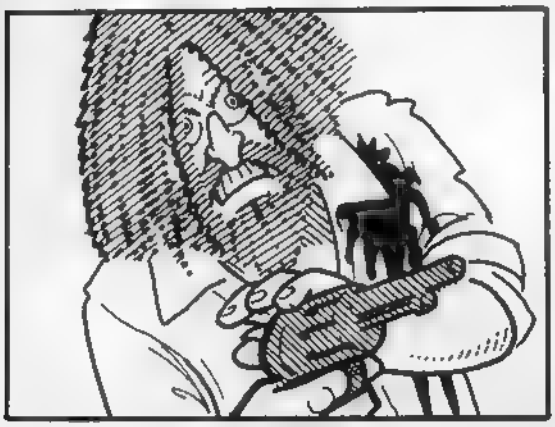
RIGHT—WHERE'S THE KID? THE BOY...WHERE IS HE? WE KNOW HE HANGS AROUND HERE WITH YOU NOW. WE'VE BEEN WATCHING THE TWO OF YOU.

WE'VE BEEN WAITING A WHOLE YEAR TO GET REVENGE ON YOU, AND WE WANT THE KID! IT WON'T WORK UNLESS WE HAVE BOTH OF YOU!

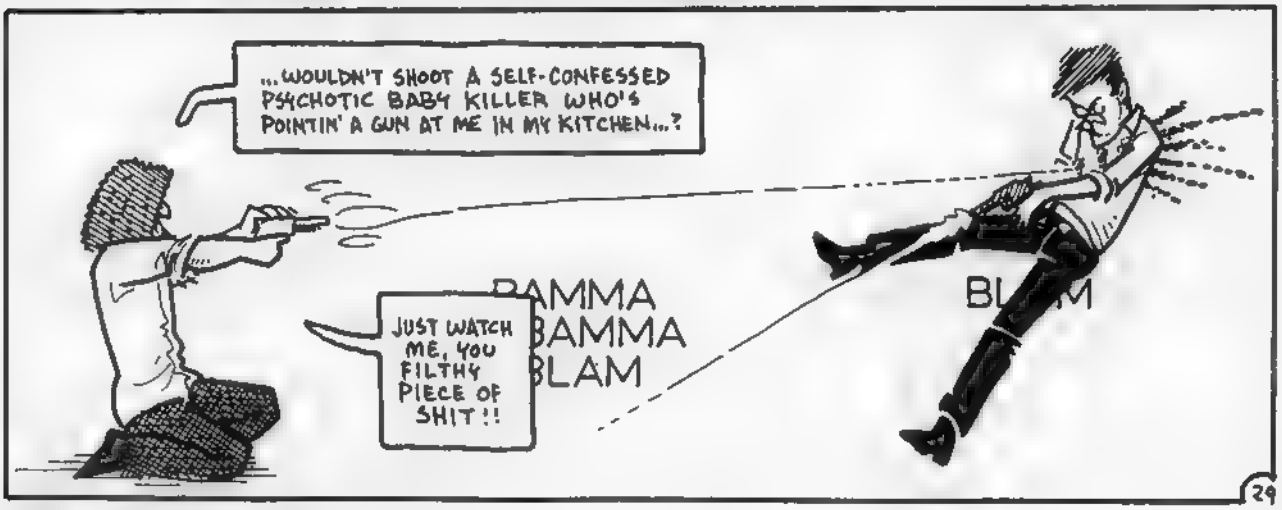
I WON'T KILL YOU IF YOU DON'T TELL ME... BUT I WILL HURT YOU!

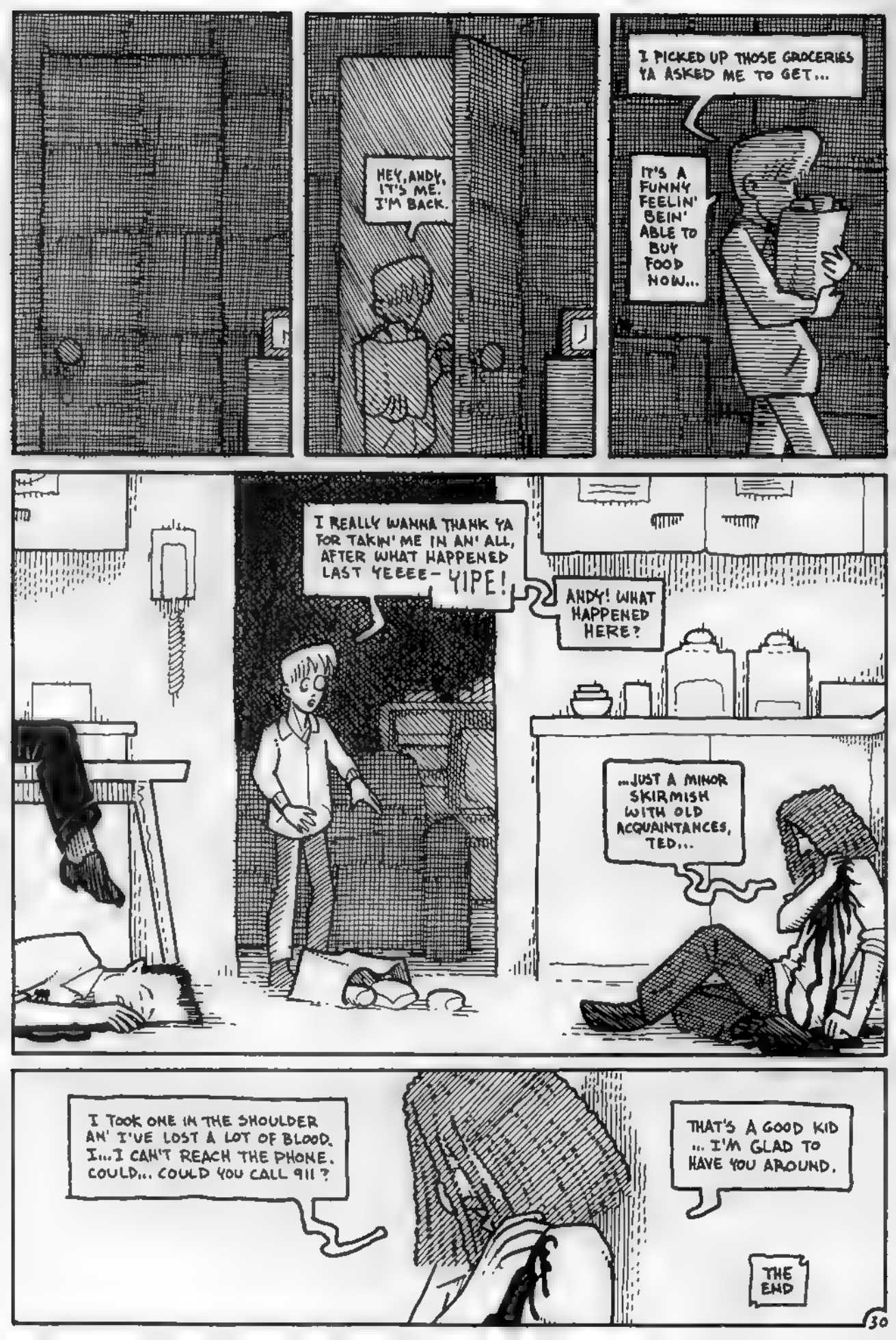

URK-
YOU-
GET OUT OF THE WAY, I CAN SHOOT HIM — HUH?!?-
YOU CRAZY SON OF A BITCH!

I...I'VE BEEN SSSSHHOOO.....



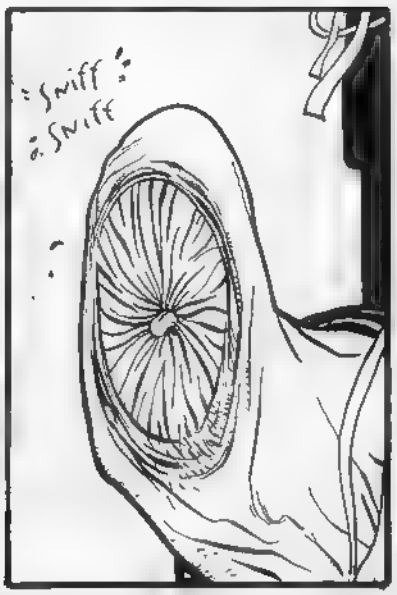
YOU...

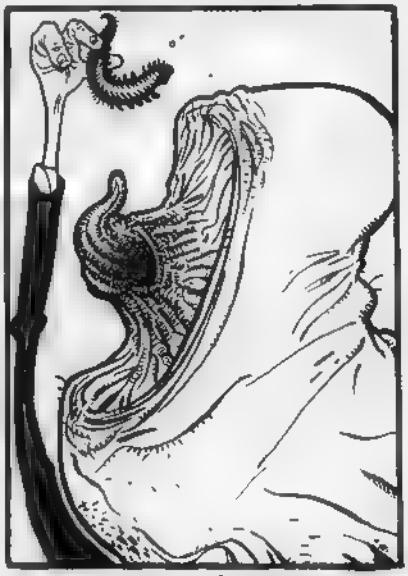

...WOULDN'T SHOOT A SELF-CONFESSED PSYCHOTIC BABY KILLER WHO'S POINTIN' A GUN AT ME IN MY KITCHEN...?
JUST WATCH ME, YOU FILTHY PIECE OF SHIT!!
BAMMA BAMMA BLAM
BLAM


HEY, ANDY, IT'S ME. I'M BACK.
I PICKED UP THOSE GROCERIES YA ASKED ME TO GET...
IT'S A FUNNY FEELIN' BEIN' ABLE TO BUY FOOD NOW...
I REALLY WANNA THANK YA FOR TAKIN' ME IN AN' ALL, AFTER WHAT HAPPENED LAST YEEEE- YIPE!
ANDY! WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
...JUST A MINOR SKIRMISH WITH OLD ACQUAINTANCES, TED...
I TOOK ONE IN THE SHOULDER AN' I'VE LOST A LOT OF BLOOD. I...I CAN'T REACH THE PHONE. COULD... COULD YOU CALL 911?
THAT'S A GOOD KID ... I'M GLAD TO HAVE YOU AROUND.
THE END

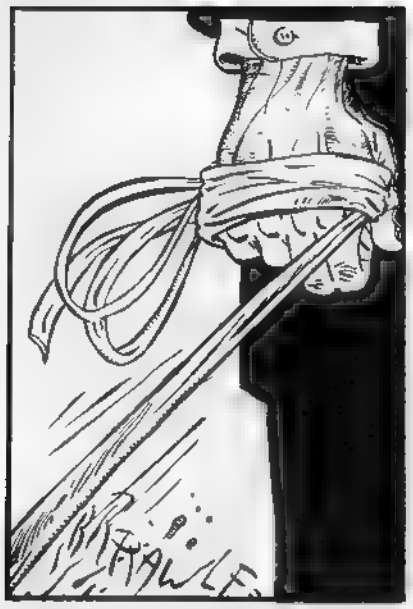
johnny 23 by al columbia ©1992

for: alan moore, rick veitch, marc bodé, marc arsenault, greg brisden, dave sim, melinda gebbie, rick sala, + mike allred.



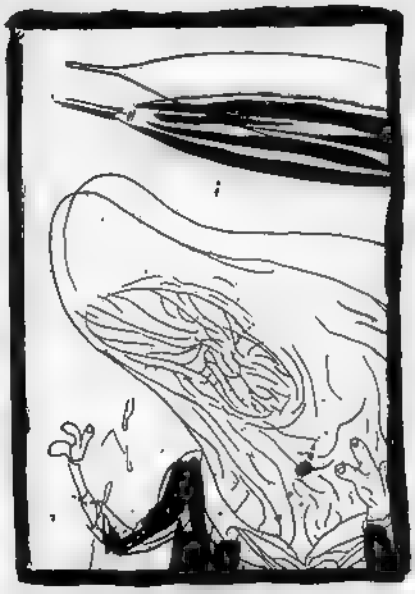


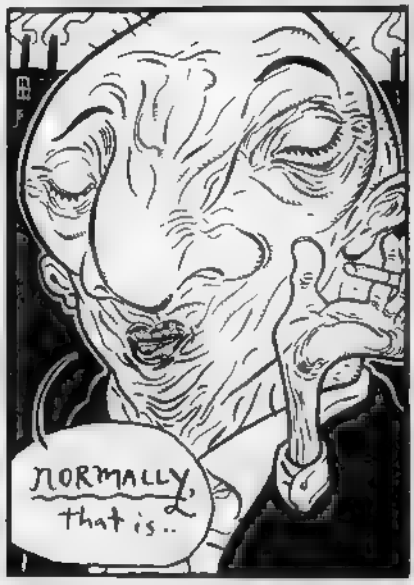
very special thanks to: stephen f. bissette and barbara jenny.


FAWLE

no
GASP
GASP
BULCH
RAWL

NORMALLY, I'd have beaten this animal to a bloody pulp for that there.




NORMALLY, that is..

HOWEVER, the last time something like this happened, I used my UMBRELLA...

and it OPENED up in mid-swing.

Shit
MMPHHH

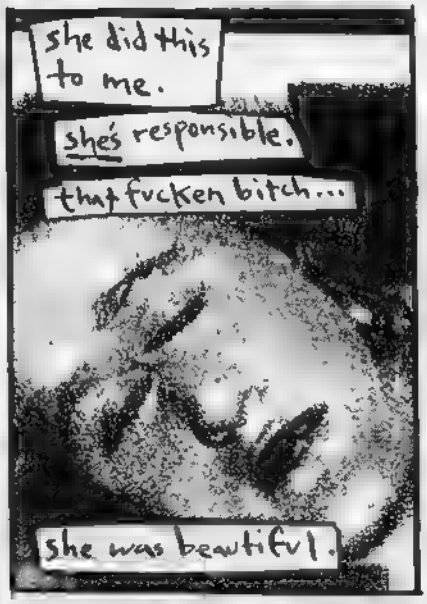
I was absolutely MORTIFIED!
I became a social leper! my homelife took on a downward Spiral.
SHUT FUCK DIE No!! DIE BITCH
but that goes without saying...
I've since found singing a sweet and pretty song can be very theraputic...

Saint Sinatra...
pretty, pretty song..

to chase away them sexy horrors...
fucken
bad dreams

she's everywhere
she's getting fucked ha
she's getting fucked hard by someone I don't know...
therapeutic
you're getting
you're getting better
no.
sick

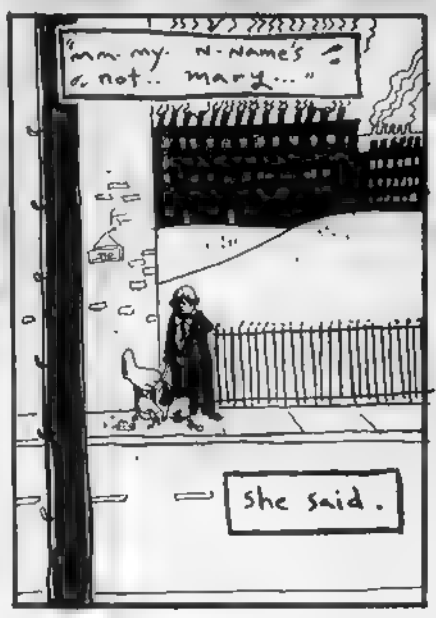
sickness is therapy..


she did this to me.
she's responsible.
that fucken bitch...
she was beautiful.

she adhered to the eye

I loved her..
I said to her: 'I could TRAVEL, Mary! I could travel to france! I could travel all over the world! Is that what you want? for me to travel around the world? Is that what you want?'

sniff-s I.. I just w-want y-you to.. l-l-leave me alone.. sniff-s


"mm-my N-Name's o-not.. mary..."
she said.

The End

©1992 Jeff Nicholson
I WOKE UP IN AN UNFURNISHED APARTMENT WITH MY JUNK LYING ALL ABOUT, HALF IN BOXES, HALF NOT. WAS I MOVING IN OR MOVING OUT?
I THOUGHT FOR A MINUTE THERE MIGHT BE A CAT IN THE FREEZER, BUT WHEN I WAS SURE THERE WASN'T I KNEW I WAS MOVING OUT AND IT WAS OVER.
IT WAS ONE OF THE MORE ALCOHOL-SOAKED PERIODS OF MY LIFE.
IT WAS HARD TO DISTINGUISH THE DRUNKEN DREAMS FROM THE DAY DREAMS FROM THE FACT BASED NIGHTMARES...
I PANICKED WITH THE THOUGHT THAT MY HANDS, MORE IMPORTANTLY, MY DRAWING HAND, WAS CUT TO RIBBONS.
I LOOKED DOWN AND IT WAS OKAY.
THE NIGHTMARE I WOKE FROM WAS REAL. A SCENE FROM SIX MONTHS AGO. A WEDDING RING BEING PLACED UPON MY HAND OF RAKED FLESH.
HOW DID I GET THERE?
Cat Lover

THE ANSWERS ARE ALL THERE. I DON'T HAVE AMNESIA OR ANYTHING. BUT THE STORY OF THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF WASN'T ABOUT THE REAL ME.

I THINK TODAY, THIS MORNING, IS THE FIRST DAY OF ME BEING THE REAL ME AGAIN.

IF I THOUGHT OF THE WHOLE STORY ALL AT ONCE I WOULD JUST HAVE TO GO BACK TO BED, AND THE DISJOINTED NIGHTMARES.

IF I CHOSE NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT AT ALL, TO BURY IT, I WOULD PROBABLY JUST KEEP DRINKING. THAT WOULDN'T BE THE REAL ME EITHER.

I HAVE TO THINK OF IT IN PIECES.

OF COURSE THE MOST DISTINCT PIECE IS BEATING THE CAT TO DEATH WITH THE HEEL OF MY SHOE AT 3 a.m., BUT THAT'S MORE THE END OF THE STORY...

THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF CAN BE DIVIDED INTO THREE EQUAL PARTS FOR EASY REFERENCE, EACH BLOCK BEING SIX MONTHS LONG.

BLOCK ONE COULD BE CALLED "DATING THE CAT LOVER," BUT I'M NOT SURE WHY I DID IT. I DON'T KNOW WHY I KILLED THE CAT EITHER.

THE SECOND BLOCK WOULD BE "AT WAR WITH THE CAT LOVER," I'M NOT SURE WHY THAT HAPPENED AS WELL, BUT I ENJOYED KILLING THAT CAT.

THE THIRD ONE WAS "MARRIED TO THE CAT LOVER." I DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT THAT ONE JUST YET.

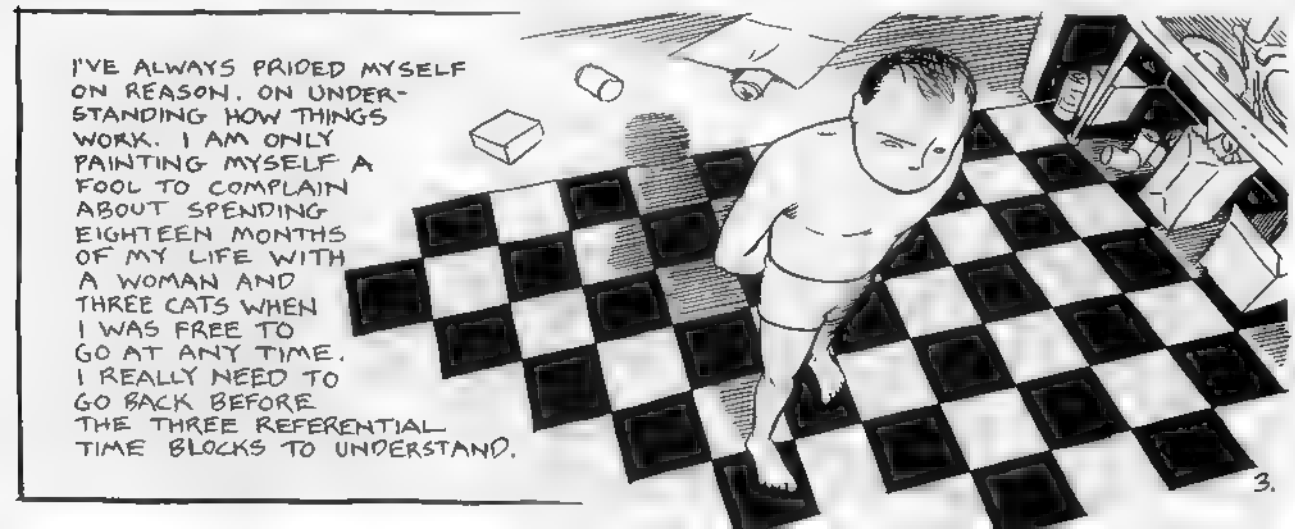
THERE ARE ALSO THREE CATS TO THIS TALE. **HER** CATS. "STAN," "GRETTA," AND "ANNABELLE" I PUT QUOTATION MARKS AROUND THESE NAMES BECAUSE I HAVE A HARD TIME USING HUMAN NAMES ON CATS.

IT'S NOT THAT I HATE CATS. THEY'RE FAIRLY INNOCENT, REALLY. IT'S THE WAY PEOPLE TRY TO MAKE THEM INTO SURROGATE CHILDREN THAT I HAVE A HARD TIME WITH. WORSHIPING SIMPLE LITTLE ANIMALS WHILE DEHUMANIZING THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH REAL PEOPLE.

"STAN" WAS A TERRITORIAL OLD SIAMESE. A SORT OF COMBINATION PERSONAL GUARD TO THE CAT LOVER, AND EVER-PRESENT MYSTIC ICON OF HER APARTMENT.

"GRETTA" WAS MY FAVORITE, BECAUSE SHE HATED THE CAT LOVER AND ADORED ME. I HAVE NO IDEA WHY.

"ANNABELLE" WAS A COMPLETELY STUPID LITTLE THING. IT MUST HAVE SUFFERED SOME INJURY AS A KITTEN, BECAUSE IT LACKED TYPICAL FELINE GRACE AND AGILITY, AND COULD BE TRICKED INTO DOING ALMOST ANYTHING.



chapter 1: Before the Cat Lover

SOMETIMES I LAUGH WHEN I THINK OF THE OPTIMISM I HAD AT AGE SIXTEEN. IT'S ONE OF THE FEW TIMES I LAUGH, AND IT'S A NERVOUS LAUGH.

IT WAS A TIME WHEN THE HIPPIES WEREN'T TOTALLY OUT, AND THE PUNKS WEREN'T TOTALLY IN.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL I WAS. SOME SORT OF BLUE OYSTER HUGH CORNWELL WITH LONG HAIR AND A BELIEF THAT I WOULD SOME DAY BE REMEMBERED FOR MY ARCANE PHILOSOPHIES.

I HAD MY SHARE OF STUPID TEEN-AGE ROMANCES AND EVERYONE THOUGHT I WAS A LAUGH RIOT.

I WENT TO SCHOOL WITH THE CAT LOVER. SHE HAD A FUNNY LITTLE "AFRO" THAT WAS DATED EVEN THEN, AND POINTED BREASTS, LIKE THOSE YOU SEE ON WOMEN IN MOVIES FROM THE 1950'S.

I DEDUCED THAT HER BRAS MUST HAVE BEEN PASSED DOWN FROM HER MOTHER.

BUT UNLIKE A MOVIE STARLET FROM THAT ERA, HER BODY PROJECTED NO SEXUALITY OR GRACE, AS SHE ROAMED THE HALLS LIKE A LONE GHOST.

I THINK EVERYONE FELT A LITTLE SORRY FOR HER.

THEN IN COLLEGE IT ALL WENT DOWN HILL FOR ME. I STUDIED GRAPHIC DESIGN, AND MY YOUNG PUNK-UNDERGROUND SENSIBILITIES WERE USHERED THROUGH THE CLONE FACTORY.

AND THE ROMANCES STOPPED. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT.

I WASN'T UNATTRACTIVE. I WAS NICE AND HONEST AND STILL HAD A SPRINKLING OF CLASS CLOWN LEFT IN ME. BUT THE ATTRACTIONS JUST DIDN'T HAPPEN ON THEIR OWN, AND I DIDN'T WANT TO FORCE IT.

YOU CAN JUST FEEL WHEN IT'S RIGHT TO PURSUE SOMEONE, AND IT NEVER WAS.

CONSEQUENTLY, I HAD NOTHING MORE THAN BRIEF PSEUDO-RELATIONSHIPS THAT ALWAYS LEAD TO REJECTION. THE COLLEGE GIRLS ALL JUST SEEMED TOO STRESSED OUT TO BE IN LOVE. DESPITE THIS, I STILL WORSHIPPED THE IDEA OF **FINDING** SOMEONE.

D.O.A.

IN MY LAST YEAR I DIRECTED ALL OF MY INFATUATIONS TOWARD ONE GIRL. I WAS SURE THAT PASSION WAS DEAD, THAT PEOPLE DIDN'T JUST FLY INTO EACHOTHER'S ARMS LIKE IN THE MOVIES, AND THAT LOVE HAD TO BE BUILT UP SLOWLY.

HER NAME WAS ELOISE. SHE WAS FAIRLY ATTRACTIVE, SOMEWHAT RESERVED, AND I THOUGHT THE PERFECT FEMALE COUNTERPART OF MYSELF. WE BECAME GOOD FRIENDS AND SPENT LOTS OF TIME ALONE, WALKING AND TALKING AND ALL OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU FALL IN LOVE.

THERE WAS JUST ONE PROBLEM. SHE HAD DECIDED A YEAR AGO THAT SHE DIDN'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH **ANYONE**, DUE TO SOME SETBACK FROM HER LAST ROMANCE. THAT'S WHY SHE LIKED ME. BECAUSE I DIDN'T COME ON TO HER, SHE COULD SPEND TIME WITH A MAN YET REMAIN EMOTIONALLY ALONE.

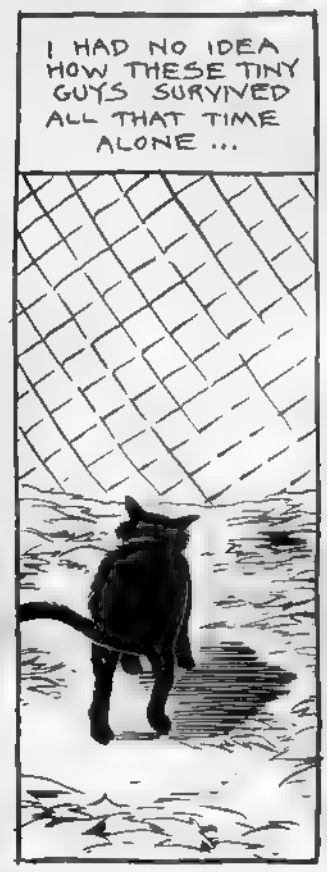
BUT INSTEAD OF PACKING MY ROMANTIC BAGS AND PURSUING SOMEONE ELSE, I DECIDED I COULD "FIX" HER. PERHAPS THAT WILL BE THE LESSON OF THIS WHOLE TALE. THAT WE TAKE ON THE MOST DIFFICULT AND FRUSTRATING TASKS IN LIFE INSTEAD OF THE WISEST. THAT'S NOT A LESSON, THOUGH.

THAT'S JUST ADMITTING HOW STUPID WE ARE. I NEED TO KNOW **WHY** WE DO IT. THAT'S WHAT THIS PUZZLE OF CATS AND WOMEN IS ALL ABOUT.

ELOISE AND I KEPT A PLEASANT EQUILIBRIUM THAT YEAR, BUT I WANTED THINGS TO PROGRESS.

I FELT THAT IF I COULDN'T FIND A COMPANION THEN, DURING CONTACT WITH ALL OF THOSE AVAILABLE WOMEN, I WOULD NEVER FIND ONE IN THE POST-COLLEGE WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

BUT FINALS WERE COMING UP AND I FELT TOO STRESSED OUT WITH TESTS AND PRESENTATIONS AND CORPORATE IMAGE SYSTEMS TO STOMACH ANY REJECTION. THE WHOLE WORLD WAS WATCHING ME AND IF ANYTHING WENT WRONG EMOTIONALLY, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO FACE ANOTHER GROUP CRITIQUE ON WHY I CHOSE HELVETICA LIGHT CONDENSED.



ITS EYES WERE COMPLETELY SCABBED OVER FROM INFECTION. IT MEWED AND STUMBLED AND I THOUGHT I MIGHT SCREAM.

IT WAS THE MOST HORRIFIC THING I HAD SEEN IN MY LIFE. I PICKED UP A LARGE STICK AND PUT IT OUT OF ITS MISERY.

I HAD ELOISE OVER FOR DINNER A FEW TIMES.

I LIKED PUNK. SHE LIKED JAZZ. I DRANK BEER. SHE DRANK WINE. I LIVED IN A CONVERTED WAREHOUSE. SHE RENTED A CONDO. PUZZLE PIECES THAT DIDN'T FIT.

SHE LOOKED SURPRISINGLY COMFORTABLE BUT OUT OF PLACE IN MY SHACK OF A DWELLING.

SHE SAT POISED, HOLDING HER FORK LIKE A SURGEON'S INSTRUMENT, INSTEAD OF THE SHOVELLING APPROACH I TOOK.

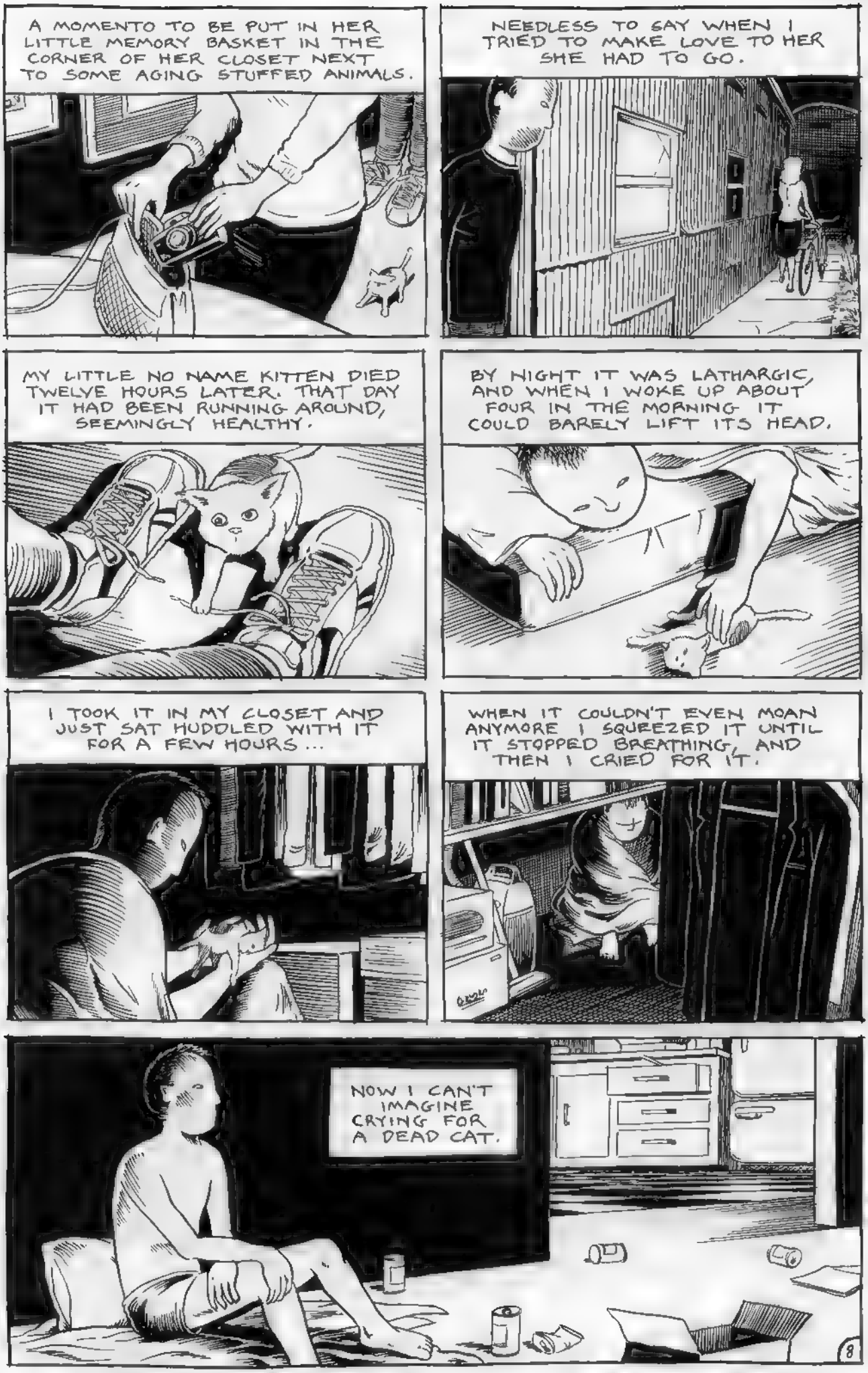
I HAD TO SLOW DOWN OR I'D BE FINISHED EATING BEFORE SHE HAD HER FIRST SIP OF WINE. BUT THIS WAS THE LAST WEEK OF CLASS, AND MY FEAR AND PATIENCE WERE OVER.

I HAD IT ALL PLANNED. THIS WOULD BE "OUR" NIGHT.

I CHOREOGRAPHED THIS LAST DINNER TO FALL JUST AFTER OUR LAST CLASS TOGETHER, BUT A FEW DAYS BEFORE GRADUATION CEREMONIES, WHEN SHE MIGHT SLIP AWAY FOREVER. SHE DREADED GRADUATION, BY THE WAY, HAVING NO VISION OF WHAT SHE WANTED BEYOND SCHOOL, WHILE FOR ME IT WAS THE MOST LIBERATING EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE. TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PUZZLES POURED TOGETHER INTO ONE BOX

SHE LOOKED AT MY WORLD WITH AMUSEMENT (A **SAFE** AMUSEMENT). I WAS THE FUNKY COLLEGE PERSON SHE WISHED SHE COULD BE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME DIDN'T WANT TO BE. SHE TOOK MY PICTURE STANDING IN FRONT OF MY LITTLE "NON-COMMERCIAL" GALLERY OF ART.

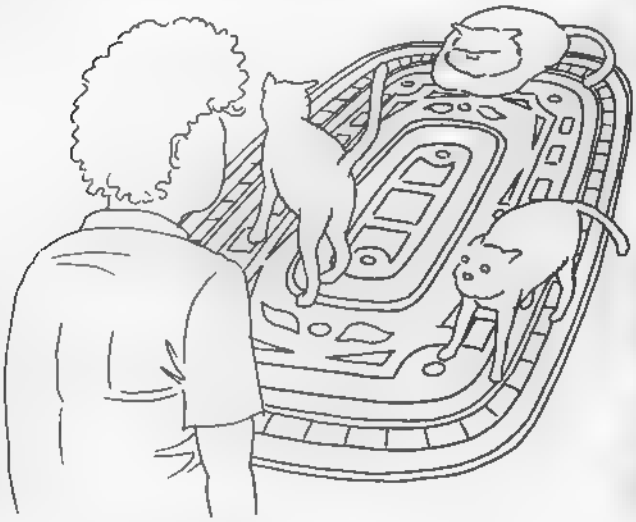
I THOUGHT TAKING A PHOTO WAS THE BEGINNING OF SHOWING AFFECTION AND PERMANENCE. IT WASN'T. IT WAS A WAY OF DOCUMENTING A BRIEF PORTION OF HER LIFE THAT SHE WOULD SOON HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH.


A MOMENTO TO BE PUT IN HER LITTLE MEMORY BASKET IN THE CORNER OF HER CLOSET NEXT TO SOME AGING STUFFED ANIMALS.
NEEDLESS TO SAY WHEN I TRIED TO MAKE LOVE TO HER SHE HAD TO GO.
MY LITTLE NO NAME KITTEN DIED TWELVE HOURS LATER. THAT DAY IT HAD BEEN RUNNING AROUND, SEEMINGLY HEALTHY.
BY NIGHT IT WAS LATHARGIC, AND WHEN I WOKE UP ABOUT FOUR IN THE MORNING IT COULD BARELY LIFT ITS HEAD.
I TOOK IT IN MY CLOSET AND JUST SAT HUDDLED WITH IT FOR A FEW HOURS...
WHEN IT COULDN'T EVEN MOAN ANYMORE I SQUEEZED IT UNTIL IT STOPPED BREATHING, AND THEN I CRIED FOR IT.
NOW I CAN'T IMAGINE CRYING FOR A DEAD CAT.

chapter 2: **Dating the Cat Lover**

IS THAT ANY EXCUSE, THEN, FOR WHAT I DID NEXT? WAS THAT LONLINESS ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR WALKING INTO A DREARY ART SUPPLY STORE AND ASKING THE CAT LOVER TO A MOVIE?

SHE DIDN'T EVEN PET THEM. SHE JUST TALKED TO THEM LIKE AN OVERGROWN CHILD WHO STILL TALKS TO HER DOLLS.

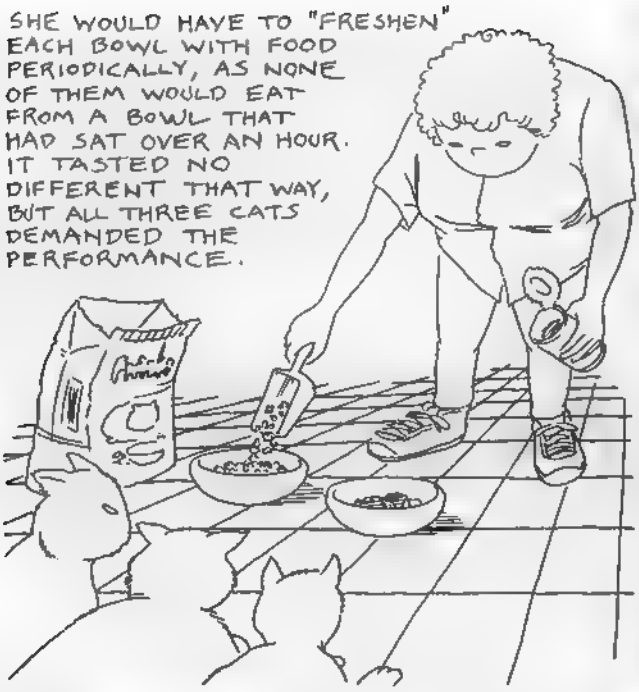


I WAS AFTER A SHYNESS, A HUMILTY LOWER THAN MY OWN. BUT SHE WAS BEYOND SHY. SHE WAS LIKE A CARICATURE OF DISPARITY. I HAD TO LEAVE.

ONE OF THEM, "GRETTA", DIDN'T EVEN LIKE HER. SHE WOULD SING TO IT, ONLY TO HAVE IT'S PAWS PRESSED TO HER FACE IN DEFIANCE.

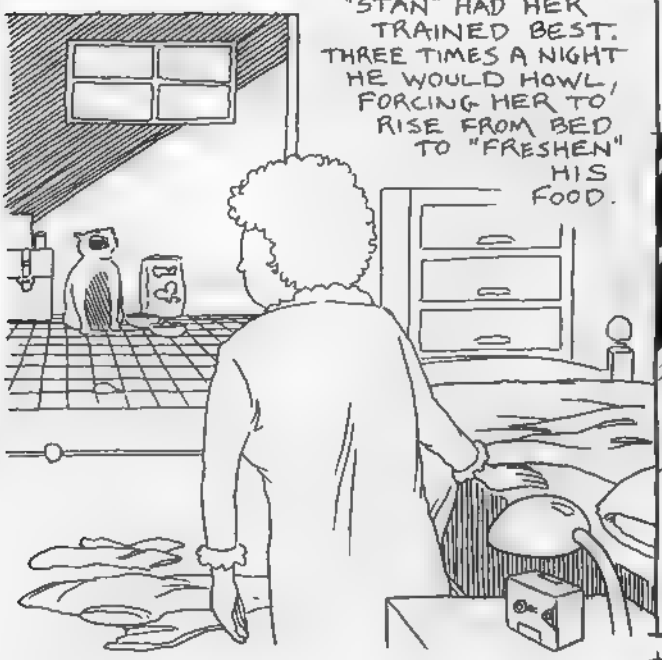
I WAS SO RELIEVED I HADN'T ASKED HER. UNTIL THE VOICE (CAN I BLAME IT ON THE GERBIL KING? NO, I CAN'T.) UNTIL **MY** VOICE REMINDED ME OF ALL THE GIRLS I DIDN'T ASK, AND THE REJECTIONS WHEN I DID. I HAD TO WIN, AND WITH HER I COULD.

SHE WOULD HAVE TO "FRESHEN" EACH BOWL WITH FOOD PERIODICALLY, AS NONE OF THEM WOULD EAT FROM A BOWL THAT HAD SAT OVER AN HOUR. IT TASTED NO DIFFERENT THAT WAY, BUT ALL THREE CATS DEMANDED THE PERFORMANCE.



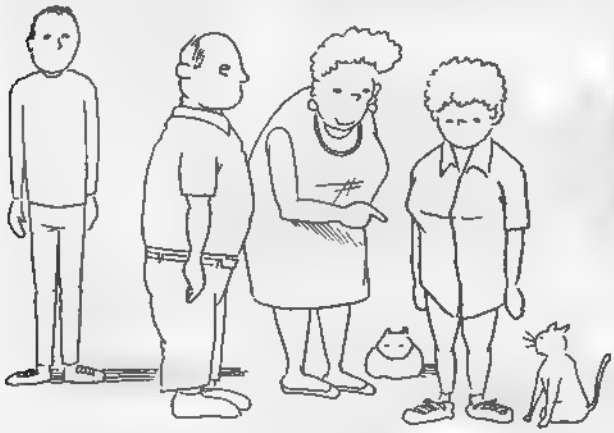
I RETURNED TO THE ART STORE AND ASKED. SHE PLACIDLY CONSENTED.

"STAN" HAD HER TRAINED BEST. THREE TIMES A NIGHT HE WOULD HOWL, FORCING HER TO RISE FROM BED TO "FRESHEN" HIS FOOD.



ON OUR DATE I NOTICED ALL THE PRETTY GIRLS, AND FELT CONFIDENT THAT SOMEONE AS UNATTRACTIVE AND UNASSUMING AS THE CAT LOVER COULD NEVER BE AS MUCH TROUBLE AS THEM.

HER PARENTS SECRETED BITTER OLD FAMILY TENSIONS. NOTHING CAT LOVER SAID COULD ESCAPE BEING TWISTED THROUGH THEIR WARPED JUDGEMENTS AND ATTITUDES. HER MOTHER WAS SO ASHAMED OF HER, SHE WOULD DEGRADE HER IN FRONT OF ME, AS IF TO PROVE SHE WASN'T RESPONSIBLE FOR HER BY DISASSOCIATION.



SHE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO ME MEETING SOMEONE BACK AT HER APARTMENT AFTER THE MOVIE. I FEARED SHE WAS GOING TO SUBJECT ME TO HER PARENTS ON OUR FIRST DATE

BUT IT WASN'T HER PARENTS SHE HAD IN MIND. "I WANT YOU TO MEET MY CATS." IT WAS THEN THAT SHE LIT UP. LOOKED HAPPY I HAD NEVER SEEN HER THIS WAY IN SCHOOL I FELT A BIT SILLY SAYING HELLO TO INDIFFERENT CATS, BUT PLAYED ALONG WITH IT.

I FELT SORRY FOR HER, BUT IN A WAY FELT SAFE IN THIS LITTLE INTROVERTED BASEMENT APARTMENT

ELOISE MOVED BACK TO HER PARENTS HOUSE IN THE NEXT CITY. ONE WEEKEND I FOLLOWED. AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE (ALWAYS LUCKY IN LOVE) ALSO LIVED THERE, AND WOULD PUT ME UP. I SANG THE **XTC** TUNE, "SGT. ROCK IS GOING TO HELP ME" ALL THE WAY THERE

CAT LOVER WAS A FELLOW ARTIST, IT TURNED OUT. AS SOMEONE WHO DREW ALL HIS LIFE, I WAS ALWAYS SKEPTICAL OF SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T "BECOME" AN ARTIST UNTIL COLLEGE, BUT TRIED TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND.

MY FRIEND WAS A CAB DRIVER. WE DRANK AND HUNTED DOWN ELOISES PARENTS HOUSE WITH THE HELP OF HIS THOMAS BROS. MAPS AND A FEW PHONE CALLS. I WOULD WIN HER OVER WITH SOME WHACKY STUNT, JUST LIKE IN THE MOVIES.

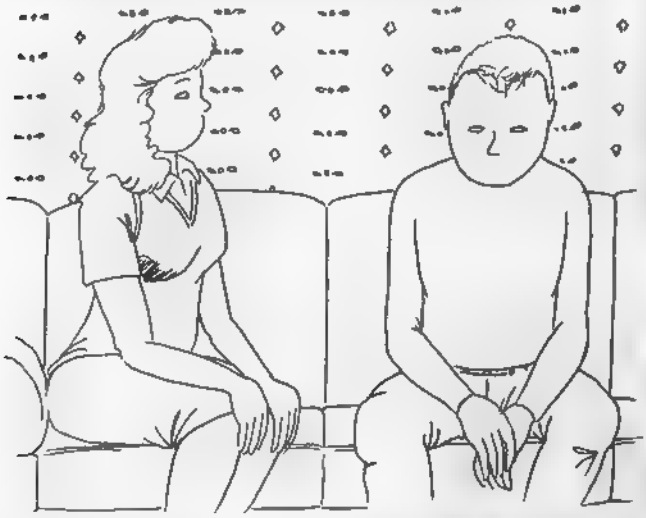
CAT LOVERS ART WAS STRANGE. HALF HUMAN, HALF CAT IMAGES. HALF HUMAN, HALF CLOWN IMAGES.

WERE THEY SELF-PORTRAITS?

MY SURPRISE VISIT WITH ELOISE WAS A DISASTER. I WAS BETTING ON THE IDEA THAT AWAY FROM THE PRESSURES OF SCHOOL AND ALONE AT HER FOLKS, SHE WOULD BE GLAD TO SEE ME. IT WAS A LOSING CRAP SHOOT THAT COST THE REMAINDER OF MY SELF-ESTEEM.

I FORGOT ABOUT MY DATE WITH CAT LOVER AND TRIED TO FOCUS ON MY NEW JOB WITH A COMBINATION WEEKLY NEWSPAPER/DESIGN HOUSE. IT DID NOT HELP.

ELOISE GAVE MY SENSE OF REALITY A DIZZYING BLOW BY DECIDING TO SOLVE HER DEPRESSION AND LACK OF DIRECTION BY GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL.



CAT LOVER DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MY LACK OF INTEREST AND PURSUED ME FOR MORE CONTACT.

A FRIEND OF HERS, ABOUT TEN YEARS HER SENIOR, ADVISED HER TO "BED ME" BEFORE I GOT AWAY.

HER FRIEND HAD BEEN A MODEL FOR SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO (A FACT ALL WERE REMINDED OF REGULARLY) AND KNEW THESE THINGS

THAT LED TO THE ONLY ACT OF AGGRESSIVE SEXUALITY IN THE ENTIRE EIGHTEEN MONTHS.

AFTER THAT, SHE DREW ILL WITH A STRESS DISORDER, TO THE POINT OF BEING BEDRIDDEN.

HER "FRIEND" AND FAMILY BECAME SCARCE, AND IT WAS UP TO ME TO CONVALESCE HER.

IT WAS DURING THESE MONTHS OF ILLNESS THAT I SEMI-MOVED IN AND DECIDED THAT I WAS IN LOVE WITH HER.

IT HAPPENED SLOWLY. SINCE I ALWAYS FELL FOR EVERONE ELSE RIGHT AWAY, AND NONE OF THOSE RELATIONSHIPS EVER WORKED OUT, THEN THIS SLOWLY BUILT, LUKE-WARM FEELING MUST BE REAL LOVE. I ALWAYS PRIDED MYSELF ON REASON.

chapter 3: **At War With the Cat Lover**

WHEN I WAS A BOY I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO FEEL ABOUT CATS. I LIKED THEM, BUT THE OLDER BOYS USED THEM FOR TORTURE, AND I WANTED TO BE LIKE THE OLDER BOYS.

STUFFED WITH FIRECRACKERS AND BEATEN HALF TO DEATH, I JUST DESENSITIZED MYSELF TO THEIR PLIGHT.

IF I EVER CAUGHT ONE ON MY OWN, I JUST DIDN'T HAVE THE HEART TO DO ANYTHING TO IT.

ONCE THE BOYS BROKE ONES SPINE, THEY WERE SO EXCITED BECAUSE IT WAS ALIVE YET COULDN'T RUN AWAY.

I REACHED DOWN TO TOUCH IT. TO SEE WHAT A PARALYZED ANIMALS BODY FELT LIKE.

IT USED ALL ITS FRIGHTENED WILL TO PIVOT ITS NECK AND DELIVER A POWERFUL BITE TO THE FATTY PALM OF MY HAND.

NOW, AFTER SIX MONTHS OF DATING, THE PASSIVE CAT LOVER BEGAN TO BITE.

OUR DIFFERENCES BECAME ARTICLES OF WAR. SHE DIDN'T LIKE MY DRINKING. I HARDLY DRANK COMPARED TO BEFORE THE RELATIONSHIP, BUT TO HER, ANY AMOUNT MEANT I "WAS DRINKING."

I DIDN'T LIKE HER EATING, AND FLUCTUATING WEIGHT; BEING DRAGGED OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF WINTER FOR ICE CREAM.

I BECAME SCEPTICAL OF HER ARTWORK AFTER DISCOVERING EVERYTHING SHE HAD DONE WAS COPIED ON A LAZY LUCY PROJECTOR. SHE STARTED BANISHING ME FROM HER STUDIO.

CLEANLINESS WAS ANOTHER PART OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

SHE IDOLIZED AND TRIED TO EMULATE THE DECORATOR HOME LOOK OF HER MAGAZINE HAS-BEEN FRIEND, YET COULD NOT HELP SCATTERING DEBRIS ALL OVER THE HOUSE

AT TIMES, THERE WERE ACTUAL PATHS THROUGH THE HOUSE.

IF SHE KNEW HER PARENTS WERE COMING, SHE WOULD STUFF ALL OF THE JUNK INTO A SPARE ROOM, PACKED LIKE MR. WHOOPIE'S CLOSET.

MORE FRIENDS SHE IDOLIZED WERE THE CAT OBSESSIVES. THEY HAD TWENTY-SEVEN OF THEM, ALL COMPLETELY INDIFFERENT TO HUMANS. WHEN THE CATS OUTNUMBER THE PEOPLE THAT WAY, THEY SEEM CONVINCED THEY **OWN** THE HOUSE, AND HAVEN'T A CARE FOR PETTING OR PURRING.

HAVING DINNER THERE, I FELT MYSELF FULL OF AN ANXIOUS DESIRE TO CLUB THEM ALL TO DEATH.

I WAS TIRED OF BRINGING A CHANGE OF CLOTHES OVER EVERY DAY. SHE WOULDN'T HEAR OF ME MOVING IN, BUT WANTED ME TO SPEND THE NIGHT EVERY NIGHT AND HAVE MEALS TOGETHER. HER MOTHER WOULDN'T LIKE US LIVING TOGETHER.

THE OBVIOUS SOLUTION, THEN, WAS TO GET MARRIED. BUT SHE DIDN'T WANT TO GET MARRIED. SHE DIDN'T WANT ME TO LEAVE OR TO MOVE IN OR TO GET MARRIED, BUT TO REMAIN IN PERPETUAL LIMBO, COMMUTING BETWEEN TWO HOUSES.

I FOUND IT ALL VERY DEPRESSING. SHE TOLD ME I USED TO MAKE HER LAUGH MORE.

I BACKPEDDLED AND SPENT MORE NIGHTS AT MY APARTMENT. I COMFORTED MYSELF IN BOOZE AND MUSIC. I WAS MORE IN LOVE WITH MILWAUKEES BEST AND ELVIS COSTELLO THAN THE CAT LOVER.

THEN SHE DECIDED SHE **DID** WANT TO MARRY ME. I HAD BAD DREAMS ABOUT RUNNING A NAZI DEATH CAMP FOR CATS.

I WOKE UP AND THERE WAS A STRAY IN MY KITCHEN.

IT CAME THROUGH THE SCREEN DOOR I FORGOT TO LOCK ON THE PRECEEDING DRUNKEN SUMMER NIGHT.

I COULD SEE HOW GUILTY IT FELT. HOW PANICKED IT WAS TO SEE ME BETWEEN IT AND THE DOOR.

WE RACED AND I SLAMMED THE SCREEN SHUT. NOW IT HAD A COMPLETELY BERZERK LOOK ON ITS FACE.

I HAD TO CHASE IT! I FELT A QUEER EXCITEMENT AS I GRABBED A HEAVY SKILLET AND WENT AFTER IT.

IT RIPPED THROUGH THE PLACE WITH FANTASTIC SPEED, SKIMMING ITS WAY UP THE SCREEN DOOR, AND SOMEHOW BACKING IT OPEN FROM THE TOP, AND DISAPPEARING.

THE ADRENALIN HIGH WORE OFF AND I FELT BOTH FRUSTRATED IT GOT AWAY AND ANGRY WITH MYSELF FOR WANTING TO KILL A DUMB ANIMAL.

I TRIED TO PATCH THINGS UP WITH THE CAT LOVER...

ALL WE DID WAS ARGUE ABOUT WEDDING PLANS.

WE SOMEHOW FORMED A TRUCE BASED ON THE IDEA THAT WE WERE JUST STRESSING OUT OVER THE WEDDING.

AFTERWARDS, THERE WOULD BE NO FIGHTS ABOUT LIVING ARRANGEMENTS, I WOULDN'T DRINK SO MUCH, AND SHE WOULDN'T EAT SO MUCH ICE CREAM.

BUT I STILL FELT AN ANGER WHENEVER I SAW A CAT OUT MY WINDOW,

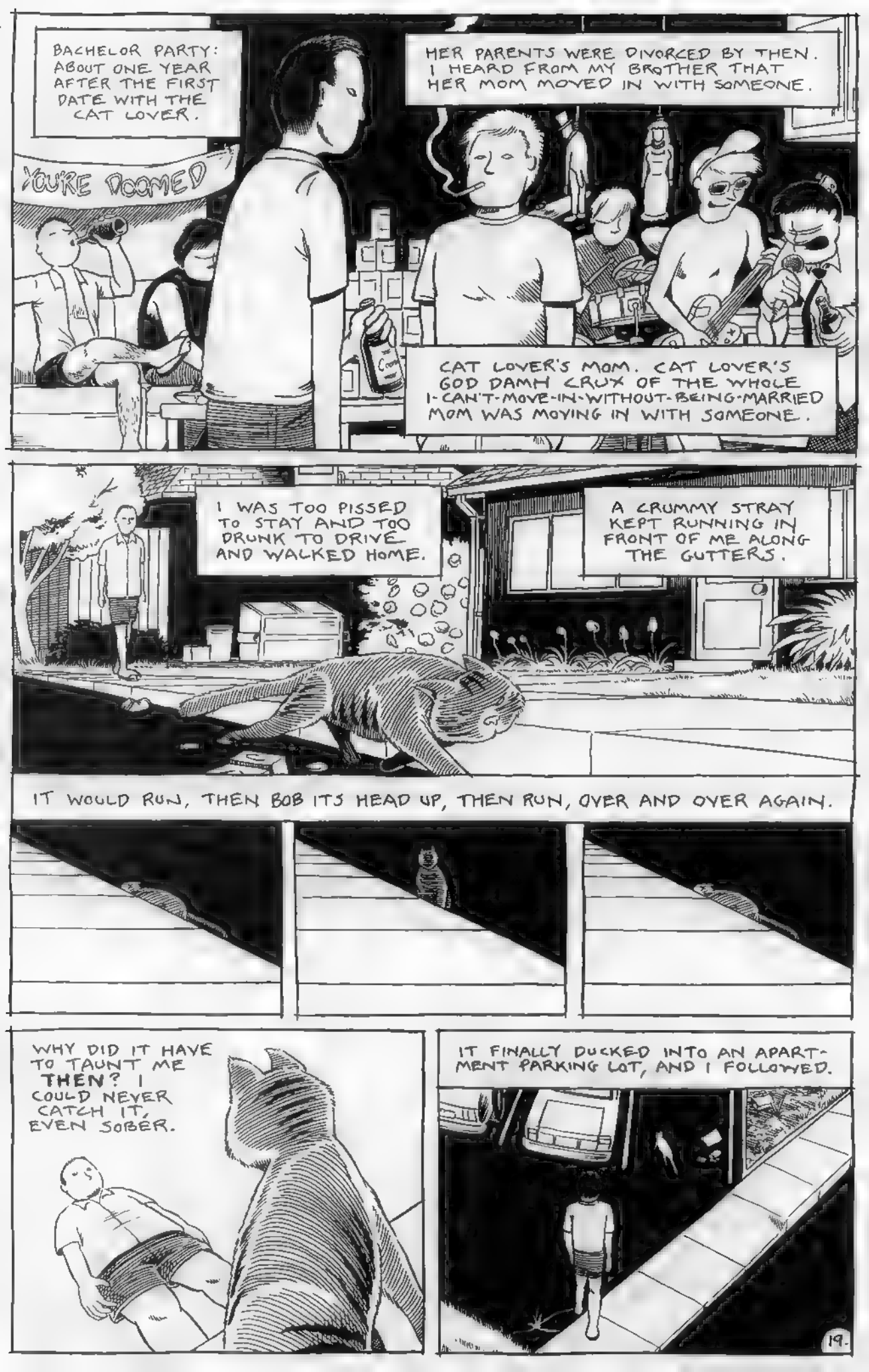
LIKE IT WAS MOCKING ME. I HAD TO FACE MY PROBLEMS WITH THE CAT LOVER TO CURE THIS SICKNESS.

I DIDN'T WANT TO KILL THEM BEFORE. NOW CLEARLY, I WANTED THEIR BLOOD.

I WANTED TO SLAM THEIR HEADS ON TO THE PAVEMENT AND WATCH THE RED SYRUP FLOW OUT OF THE BRAIN CASE.

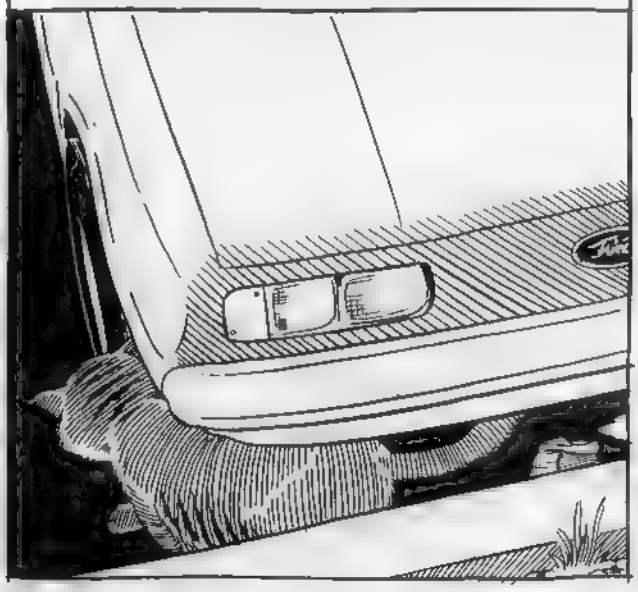
IT WAS WRONG, BUT I WOULD DO IT IF I COULD CATCH THEM.

BUT IT WAS WRONG.

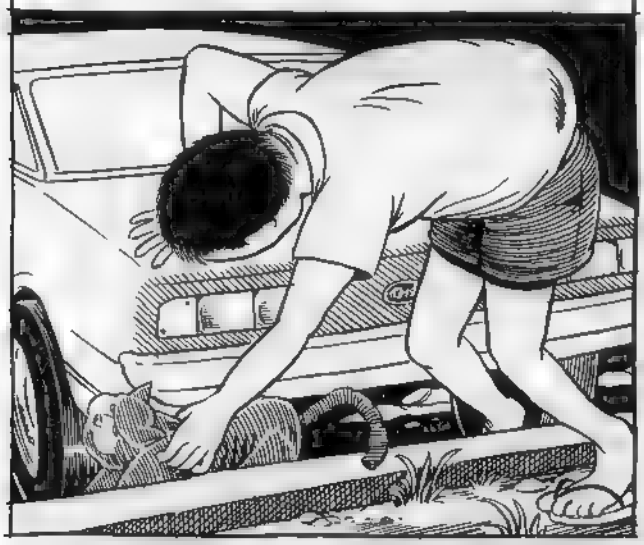

BACHELOR PARTY: ABOUT ONE YEAR AFTER THE FIRST DATE WITH THE CAT LOVER.
YOU'RE DOOMED
HER PARENTS WERE DIVORCED BY THEN. I HEARD FROM MY BROTHER THAT HER MOM MOVED IN WITH SOMEONE.
CAT LOVER'S MOM. CAT LOVER'S GOD DAMN CRUX OF THE WHOLE I-CAN'T-MOVE-IN-WITHOUT-BEING-MARRIED MOM WAS MOVING IN WITH SOMEONE.
I WAS TOO PISSED TO STAY AND TOO DRUNK TO DRIVE AND WALKED HOME.
A CRUMMY STRAY KEPT RUNNING IN FRONT OF ME ALONG THE GUTTERS.
IT WOULD RUN, THEN BOB ITS HEAD UP, THEN RUN, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.
WHY DID IT HAVE TO TAUNT ME THEN? I COULD NEVER CATCH IT, EVEN SOBER.
IT FINALLY DUCKED INTO AN APARTMENT PARKING LOT, AND I FOLLOWED.

IT RAN UNDER A CAR, AND SOMEHOW I WAS ABLE TO WALK AROUND TO THE FRONT WITHOUT IT KNOWING WHERE I WENT.

I LOOKED DOWN AND THERE IT WAS, PEERING OUT TO TRY AND SPOT ME

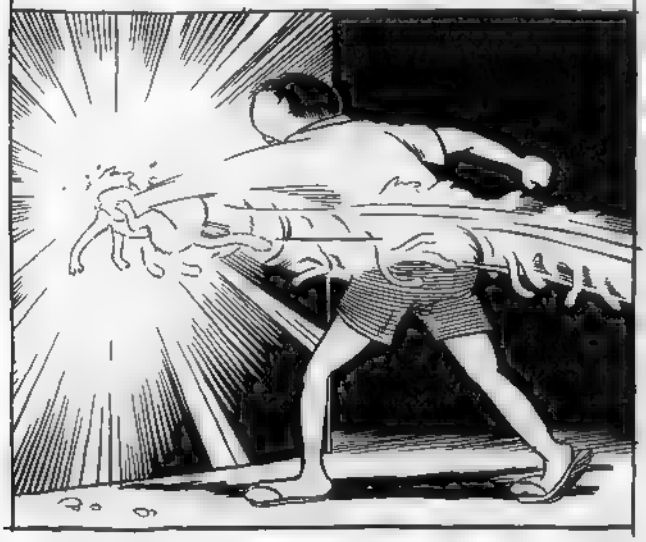


I FELT LIKE DRUNKEN MOLASSES. THAT I COULD NEVER LUNGE DOWN AND NAB IT. BUT THERE IT WAS IN MY HAND.

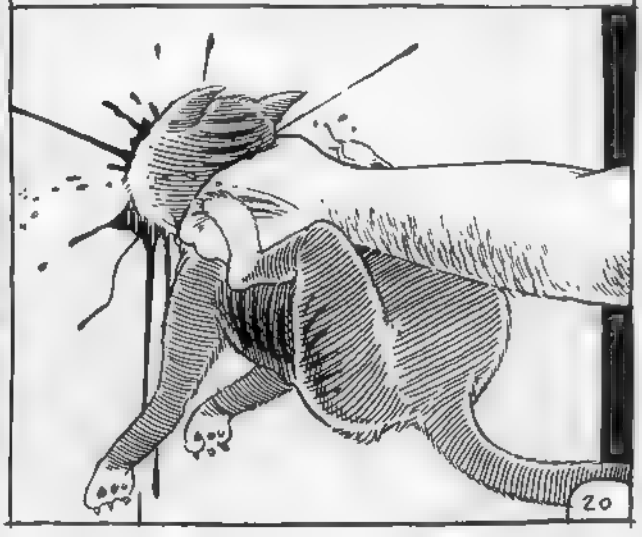


HOT DAMN! LOOK AT IT SQUIRM. MY ADRENALIN AND OVER-BEATING HEART TOLD ME TO HURRY.

BEFORE MY BRAIN COULD COME UP WITH A WAY TO KILL THIS HORRIBLE THING, MY BODY WALKED OVER TO A WALL AND SLAMMED ITS HEAD TO IT.



ITS REAR LEGS HAD DOUBLED UP AND SLASHED MY FINGERS IN THE PROCESS. IT TOOK JUST THE ONE SLAM BEFORE IT BECAME DEAD WEIGHT.



THE EUPHORIC FEELING OF CONQUEST WASHED AWAY AND I STOOD THERE REALIZING IT WAS THREE A.M. AND I HAD JUST BANGED ON AN APARTMENT WALL (PROBABLY A BEDROOM WALL).

SOME GIANT PERSON WAS PROBABLY GOING TO COME OUT IN HIS UNDERWEAR AND FIND ME SWAYING BACK AND FORTH WITH A DEAD CAT IN MY BLEEDING HANDS

FORTUNATELY, ONE DID NOT.

chapter 4: **Married to the Cat Lover**

WHICH EXPLAINS THE HAND OF RAKED FLESH ON OUR WEDDING DAY.

I WAS NOT GOING TO BE DENIED THIS ICON OF MATRIMONY, AND OPTED TO DRINK THE WHOLE BOTTLE BY MYSELF ON THE BALCONY.

I TRIED TO FORGET ABOUT IT AND ENJOY THE HONEYMOON, UNTIL I WAS ICILY ASKED...

"YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A **SECOND** GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE?"

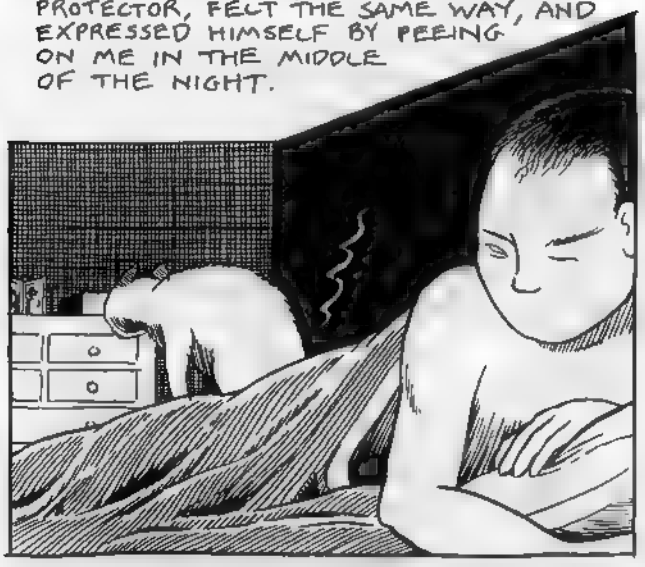
THE NEXT DAY PUT AN END TO THE HONEYMOON COMPLETELY. HER FRIEND CALLED WITH NEWS THAT ANNABELLE WAS HIT BY A CAR. SHE WAS ALREADY TAKEN TO THE VET, BUT HER FRIEND THOUGHT WE SHOULD KNOW ANYWAY.

AS IF THERE WAS ANY QUESTION WHETHER CAT LOVER WOULD FINISH THE TRIP OR RETURN HOME TO THE SICK CAT. HER FATHER'S $400 WEDDING GIFT, MEANT FOR A WASHER OR DRYER, WAS USED TO MEND THE ANIMAL'S LEG. THEN THINGS GOT WORSE.

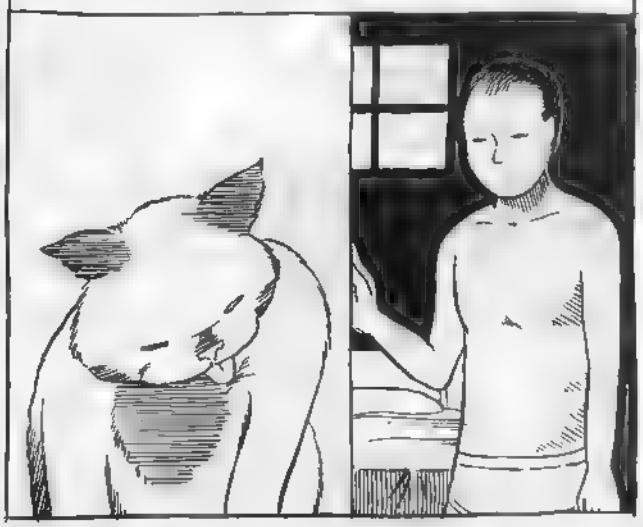
SHE BECAME PANICKED WHEN I MOVED IN, PACING AROUND THE APARTMENT LIKE AN EXPECTANT FATHER. THE ONLY SPACE I WAS ALLOTTED FOR MY STUDIO WAS THE MR. WHOOPIE'S CLOSET JUNK ROOM, BUT IT WAS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACE SHE COULDN'T GIVE UP.

SHE DECIDED TO TAKE ANNABELLE AND SPEND THE NIGHT AT A FRIENDS WHILE I GOT SITUATED. I FELT LIKE AN ALIEN

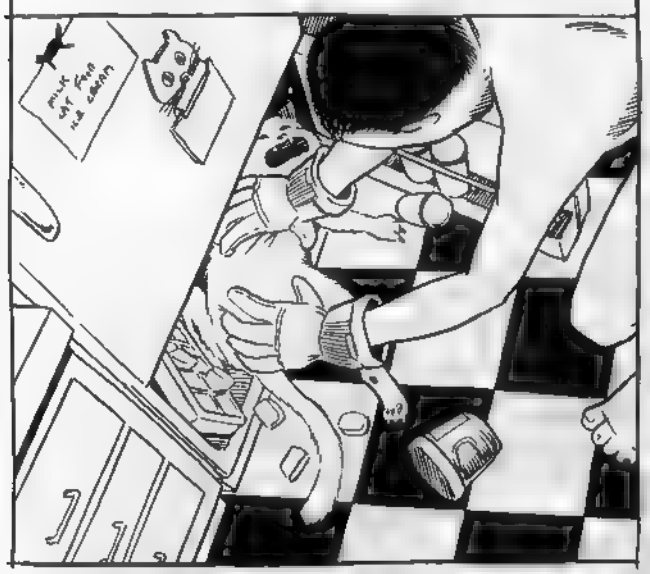
APPARENTLY STAN, HER OLD SIAMESE PROTECTOR, FELT THE SAME WAY, AND EXPRESSED HIMSELF BY PEEING ON ME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.



HE WAS GOING TO PAY, BUT HOW? I COULDN'T JUST BASH HIS HEAD IN. THE BITCH WOULD PROBABLY ORDER AN AUTOPSY ON HIM. IT HAD TO LOOK LIKE NATURAL CAUSES.



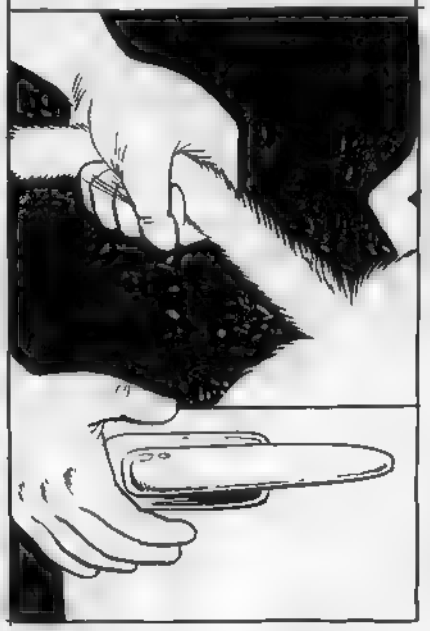
WITH MY TOUGHEST WORK GLOVES, I TOSSED THE SMUG ANIMAL INTO THE FREEZER.



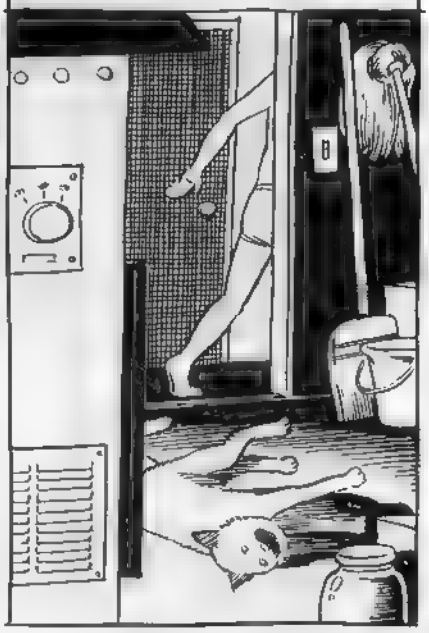
IT HOWLED ALL NIGHT, GETTING WEAKER AND WEAKER LIKE A TAPE DECK RUNNING LOW ON BATTERIES, AND I SLEPT LIKE A BABY.

I WOKE TO THE SOUND OF CAT LOVER RETURNING, AND DASHED TO THE KITCHEN.

I HEARD HER COMING DOWN THE STAIRS AS I GRABBED THE BRITTLE CAT FROM THE ICE BOX AND RAN DOWN THE HALL.



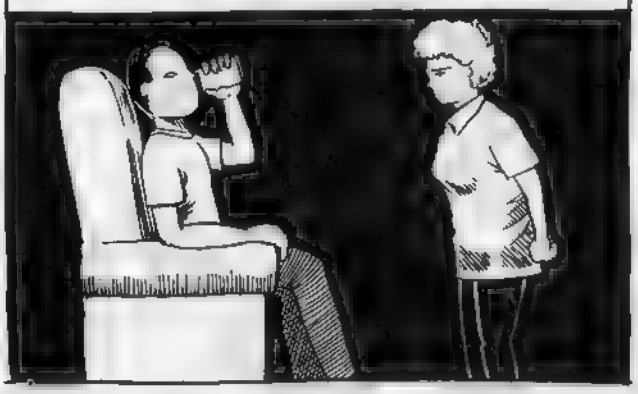
I THREW IT IN THE FURNACE ROOM WHERE IT COULD THAW AND RUSHED BACK OUT TO GREET HER.



SHE APOLOGIZED FOR LEAVING AND COMMENTED ON HOW COLD MY HANDS WERE.

SHE NEVER SUSPECTED ME IN STAN'S SUDDEN DEATH OF "OLD AGE," BUT THINGS STILL WENT DOWN HILL.

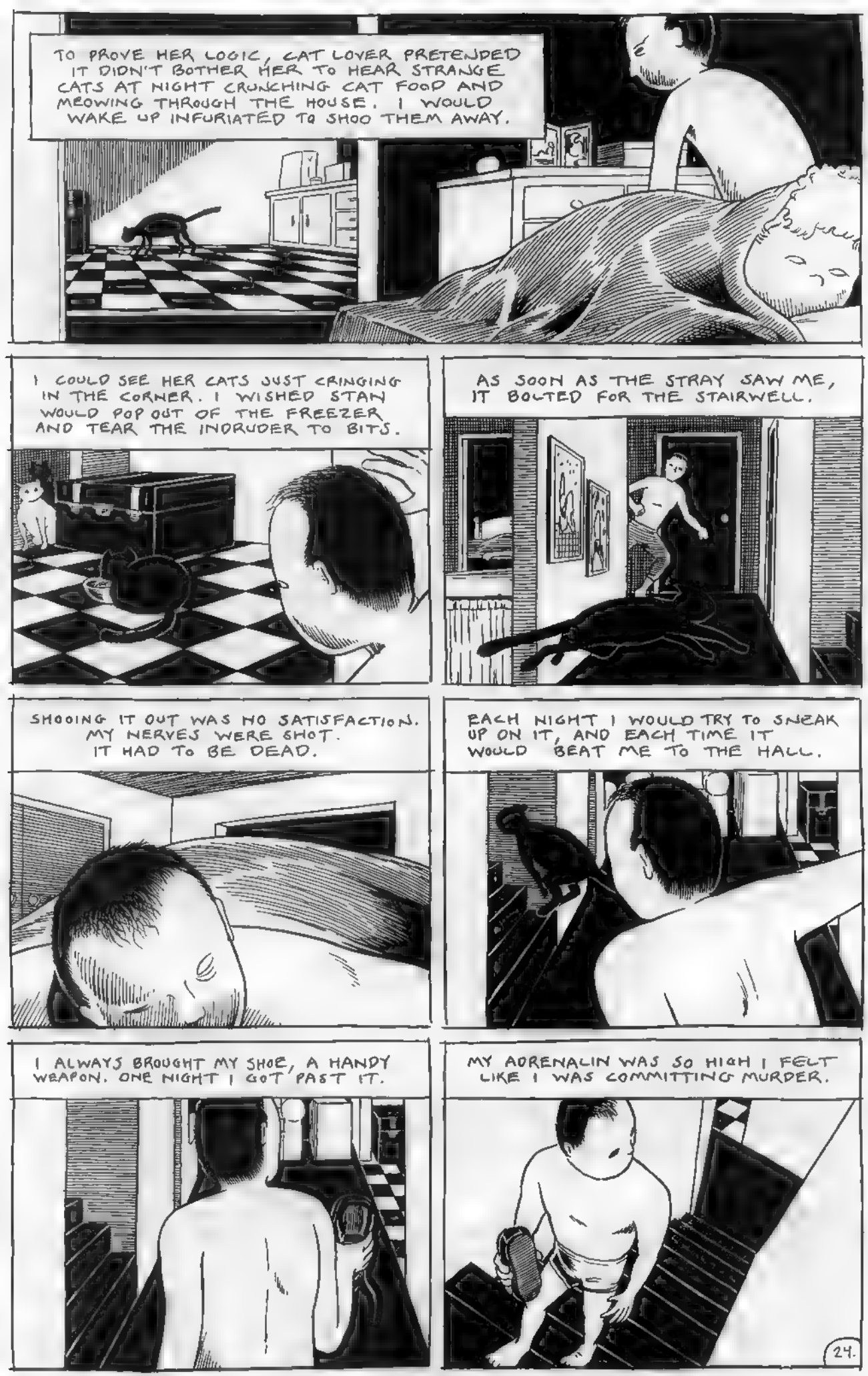
IF I BROUGHT HOME BEER AFTER A TWELVE HOUR SHIFT AND POPPED ONLY ONE, I WAS STILL GIVEN AN ATTITUDE. TO OFFER HER TO JOIN ME WAS RESPONDED WITH, "I'M NOT YOUR DRINKING BUDDY."



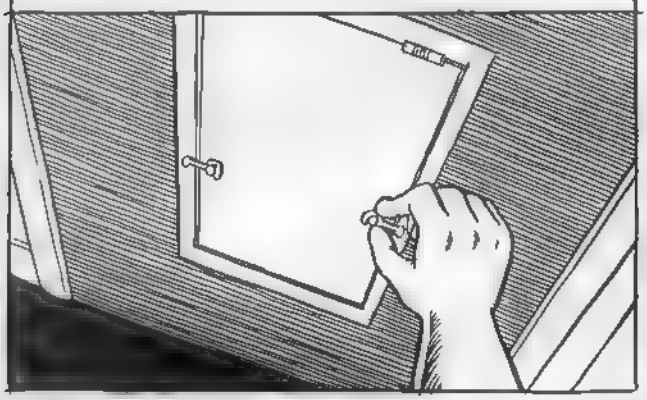
EVERY DAY SHE WOULD FIGHT ME, THEN APOLOGIZE, THEN CRY, THEN BEGIN AGAIN. SHE WAS PUNISHING ME FOR WHAT WE HAD DONE TO EACHOTHER, BUT WOULD NOT END THE MARRIAGE.

KILLING STAN BECAME MY OWN UNDOING. WITHOUT HIS DOMINANT PRESENCE, THE STRAYS STARTED SLINKING IN AT NIGHT. THERE WAS A CAT DOOR ATOP THE STAIRWELL I WASN'T ALLOWED TO LOCK.

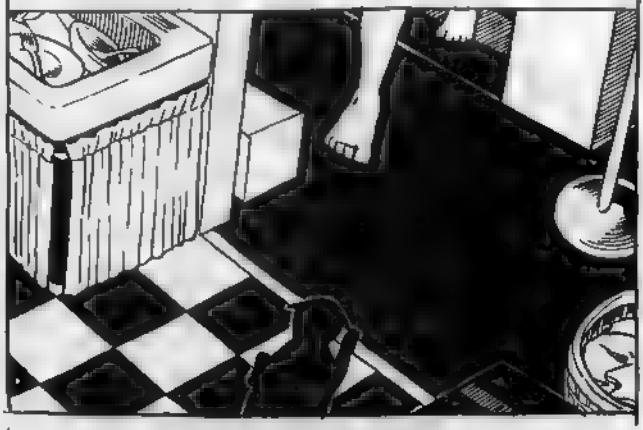
HER CATS HAD TO BE ABLE TO GO "POTTY," AND COULDN'T BE MADE TO SLEEP OUT ALL NIGHT IN THE COLD


TO PROVE HER LOGIC, CAT LOVER PRETENDED IT DIDN'T BOTHER HER TO HEAR STRANGE CATS AT NIGHT CRUNCHING CAT FOOD AND MEOWING THROUGH THE HOUSE. I WOULD WAKE UP INFURIATED TO SHOO THEM AWAY.
I COULD SEE HER CATS JUST CRINGING IN THE CORNER. I WISHED STAN WOULD POP OUT OF THE FREEZER AND TEAR THE INDRUDER TO BITS.
AS SOON AS THE STRAY SAW ME, IT BOLTED FOR THE STAIRWELL.
SHOOING IT OUT WAS NO SATISFACTION. MY NERVES WERE SHOT. IT HAD TO BE DEAD.
EACH NIGHT I WOULD TRY TO SNEAK UP ON IT, AND EACH TIME IT WOULD BEAT ME TO THE HALL.
I ALWAYS BROUGHT MY SHOE, A HANDY WEAPON. ONE NIGHT I GOT PAST IT.
MY ADRENALIN WAS SO HIGH I FELT LIKE I WAS COMMITTING MURDER.

I SNUCK UP THE BACK STAIRS AND FLIPPED THE LATCHES ON THE CAT DOOR. NOW I HAD THE BASTARD.



HE HEARD MY BLATANT STOMPING DOWN THE STAIRS AND CAME RUNNING.



HE WAS PURE BLUR. AS I BENT OVER TO BLOCK HIS ESCAPE, HE RAN UP AND OVER MY BACK WITHOUT HARDLY TOUCHING IT.

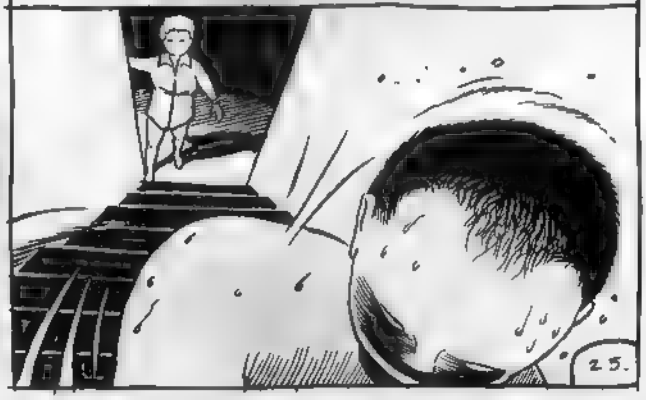
AS I RAN UP THE STAIRS I HEARD THE CLANG OF HIS HEAD ON THE TIN DOOR.

I RAN UP AND OVER HIM, PREPARING TO PUMMEL. BEFORE I COULD THINK HE WAS FORCING THE DOOR.

HE NEVER EVEN RECOILED FROM THE INITIAL HIT, JUST CONTINUED AS A WRIGGLING CAT FORCE, AND THE TIN WAS BEGINNING TO BUCKLE.

BEHIND ME SOMEONE WAS YELLING, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" WHAT WAS **IT** DOING? TRYING TO GET AWAY?

NO, **NO!** EVERY WORD NO WAS A SMACK ON THE HEAD. SOMEONE WAS YELLING NO BEHIND ME, TOO.



CAT LOVER PACKED AND MOVED OUT OF TOWN. AFTER EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF TWISTED POLITICS, IT TOOK JUST ONE WORTHLESS STRAY TO END IT. I WAS NEVER WELCOME IN HER PRIVATE CAT WORLD, AND TO TAKE THE LIFE OF ONE WAS THE ACT OF INFAMY NEEDED TO KEEP ME OUT

AT FIRST I FELT CHEATED I HADN'T DONE IT TO ANNABELLE RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER INSTEAD OF A STRAY UP THE STAIRWELL, BUT EITHER WAY I WAS ONLY DESTROYING INNOCENTS. HER SURROGATE LOVERS BECAME MY REAL VICTIMS. SHE MADE A "CAT PERSON" OUT OF ME AFTER ALL, AND WAS ESCAPING WITHOUT A SCRATCH.

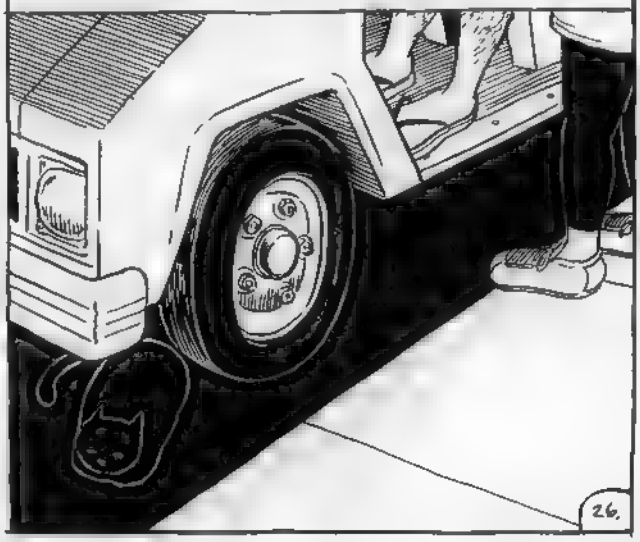
epilogue: **I Scream For Ice Cream**

THIS PART OF THE STORY I ONLY KNOW FROM SECOND HAND INFORMATION.

A FEW MONTHS AFTER MOVING UP STATE, CAT LOVER FLAGGED DOWN AN ICE CREAM TRUCK.

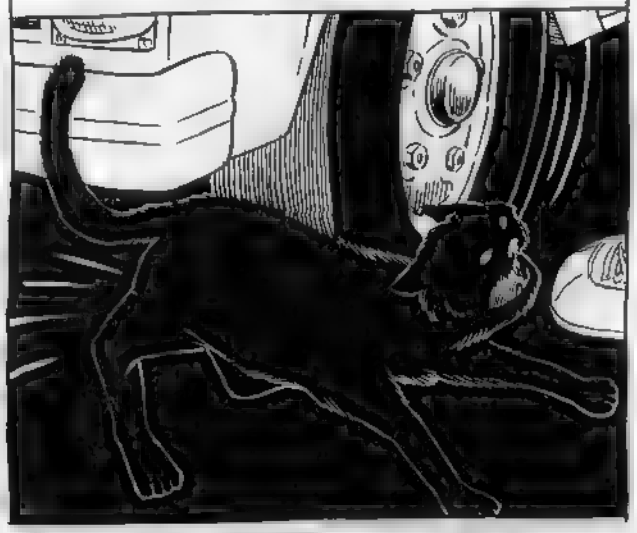
I IMAGINE A HIPPYISH VENDOR TURNING OFF HIS ENGINE, WAITING FOR HER TO CHOOSE FROM THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF FLAVORS SHE COULD NOW EAT FREELY WITHOUT SCORN

SHE DECIDES TO GET THREE KINDS TO HELP REMOVE THE MORNINGS DEPRESSION. ANNABELLE PERCHES IN FRONT OF THE TIRE PATIENTLY.



I CAN PICTURE THE SOUND OF THE STILL TRUCK. A TICKING, LIKE A UPS TRUCK HASTILY STOPPED AT AN ADDRESS. THERE'S A FORWARD MOMENTUM TO IT, LIKE IT WANTS TO GO, BUT THE BRAKE WON'T ALLOW IT.

WHATEVER IT IS THAT HOLDS IT, A GEAR OR A PAD, SLIPS A TOOTH OR A GRIP JUST AN INCH. JUST ENOUGH TO PINCH ANNABELLE'S HIND FOOT UNDER THE FRONT TIRE.

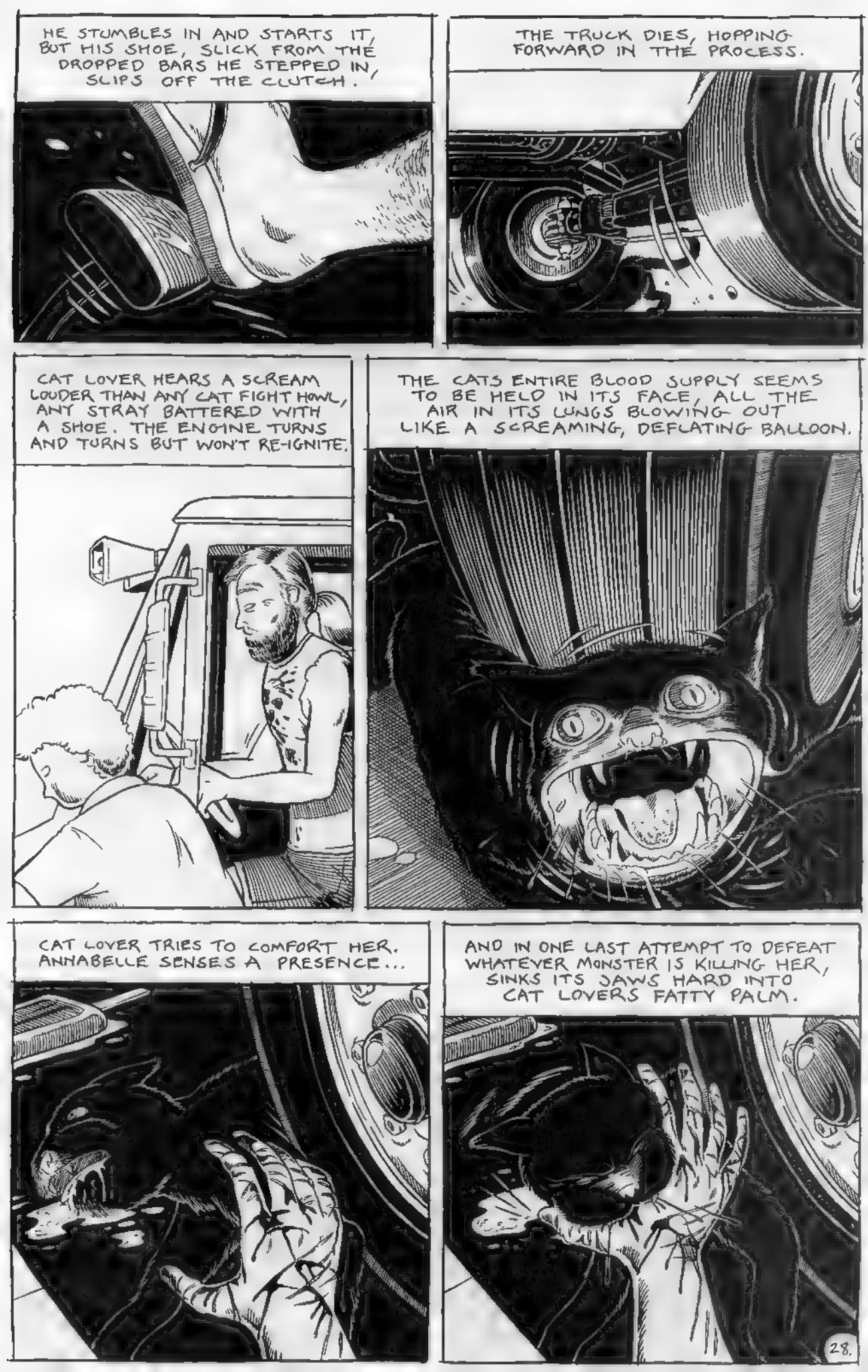


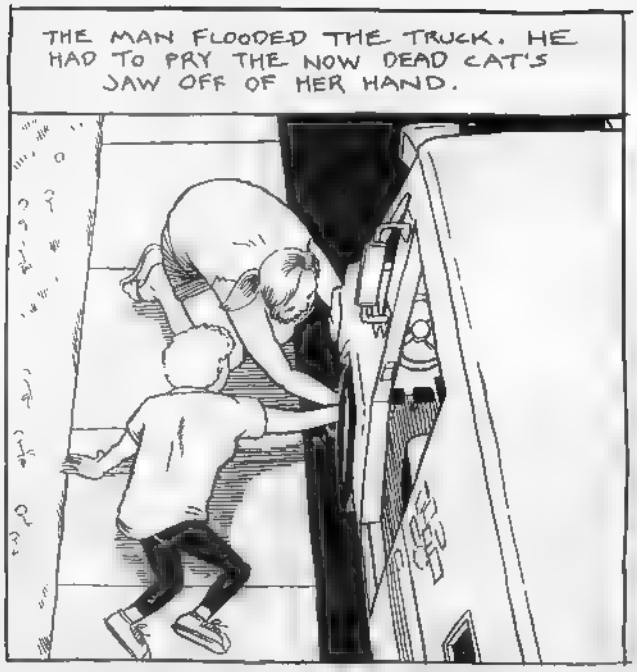
SHE YOWLPS AND TRIES TO RUN. REALIZING SHE CAN'T, SHE SCREAMS AND KICKS MANIACALLY, LIKE A JACK RABBIT CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

THE CAT LOVER DROPS HER ICE CREAM BARS AND RUNS, UNABLE TO BELIEVE WHAT SHE'S SEEING.

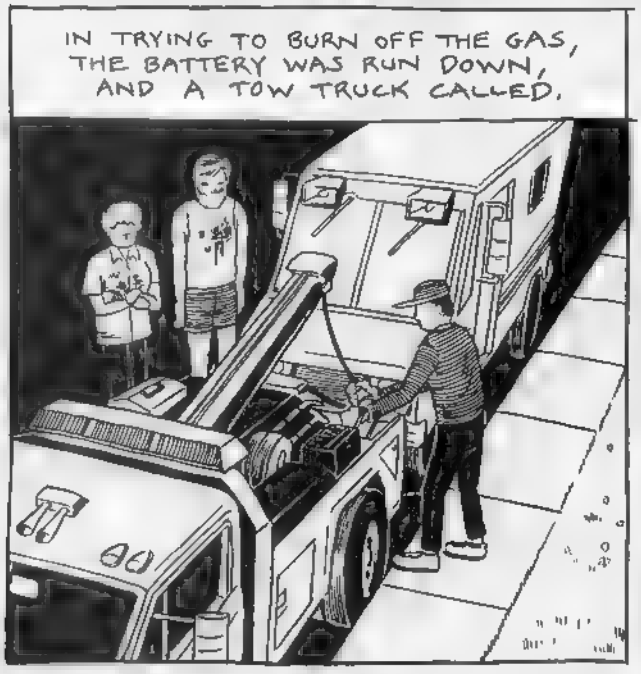
SHE STICKS HER HANDS INTO THE HYSTERICAL ANIMALS FRENZY AND RECEIVES A RAZOR SLASHING.

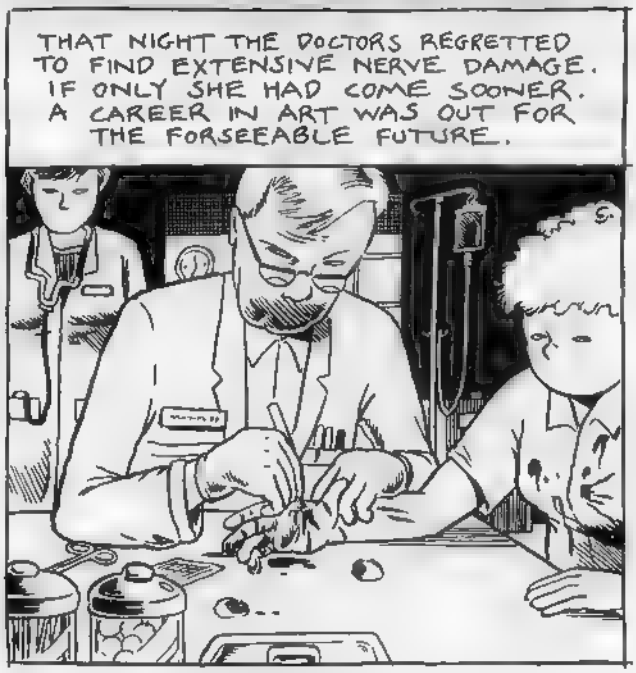
SHE SCREAMS AT THE ICE CREAM MAN TO DO SOMETHING.


HE STUMBLES IN AND STARTS IT, BUT HIS SHOE, SLICK FROM THE DROPPED BARS HE STEPPED IN, SLIPS OFF THE CLUTCH.
THE TRUCK DIES, HOPPING FORWARD IN THE PROCESS.
CAT LOVER HEARS A SCREAM LOUDER THAN ANY CAT FIGHT HOWL, ANY STRAY BATTERED WITH A SHOE. THE ENGINE TURNS AND TURNS BUT WON'T RE-IGNITE.
THE CATS ENTIRE BLOOD SUPPLY SEEMS TO BE HELD IN ITS FACE, ALL THE AIR IN ITS LUNGS BLOWING OUT LIKE A SCREAMING, DEFLATING BALLOON.
CAT LOVER TRIES TO COMFORT HER. ANNABELLE SENSES A PRESENCE...
AND IN ONE LAST ATTEMPT TO DEFEAT WHATEVER MONSTER IS KILLING HER, SINKS ITS JAWS HARD INTO CAT LOVERS FATTY PALM.


THE MAN FLOODED THE TRUCK. HE HAD TO PRY THE NOW DEAD CAT'S JAW OFF OF HER HAND.

SHE NEGLECTED TO GET IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION FOR THE BITE, UNABLE TO LEAVE ANNABELLE LYING THERE ON THE HOT PAVEMENT.


IN TRYING TO BURN OFF THE GAS, THE BATTERY WAS RUN DOWN, AND A TOW TRUCK CALLED.


THAT NIGHT THE DOCTORS REGRETTED TO FIND EXTENSIVE NERVE DAMAGE. IF ONLY SHE HAD COME SOONER. A CAREER IN ART WAS OUT FOR THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE.

I'VE COME AWAY FROM THE EXPERIENCE COMPLETELY UNINTERESTED IN PURSUING ANOTHER WOMAN.

BUT FEEL SOME SMALL COMFORT IN KNOWING THE INEFFECTUAL GRETTA IS CAT LOVER'S REMAINING COMPANION.
29.
END.

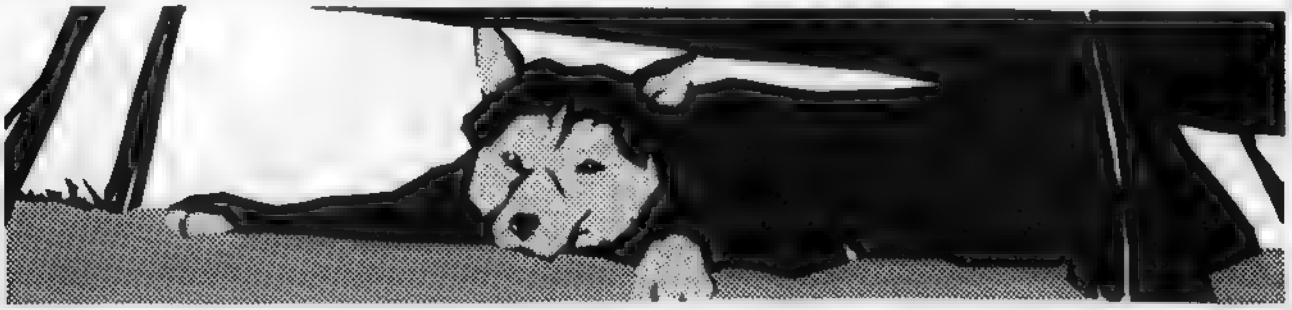
TWILIGHT

STORY BY WLADYSLAW REYMONT 15 16

ART © ALEC STEVENS 15 92

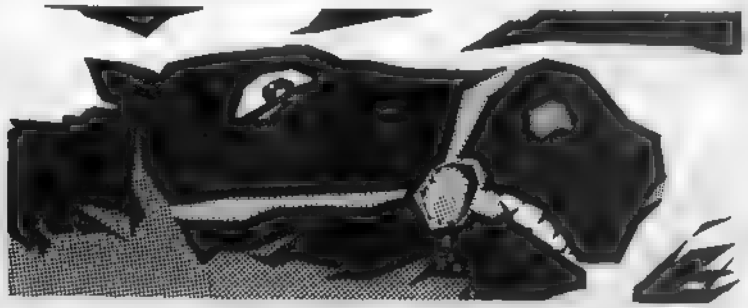
SOKOL LAY DYING. HE HAD BEEN LYING THUS FOR A LONG TIME. HE HAD FALLEN SICK AND WAS KICKED ABOUT LIKE A USELESS CARCASS. GOOD PEOPLE SAID IT WOULD BE WRONG TO KILL HIM, EVEN THOUGH HIS HANDSOME HIDE WOULD MAKE SUCH FINE LEATHER. YES, GOOD PEOPLE LET HIM DIE SLOWLY, ALONE, AND FORGOTTEN.

ONLY LAPPA, AN OLD BLIND SIBERIAN-HOUND, STAYED WITH HIM. HE LAY DOZING UNDER THE FEED-TROUGH, OPPRESSED WITH SORROW AT THE SIGHT OF SOKOL, WHOSE LARGE, PLEADING, TEARFUL EYES FRIGHTENED HIM.



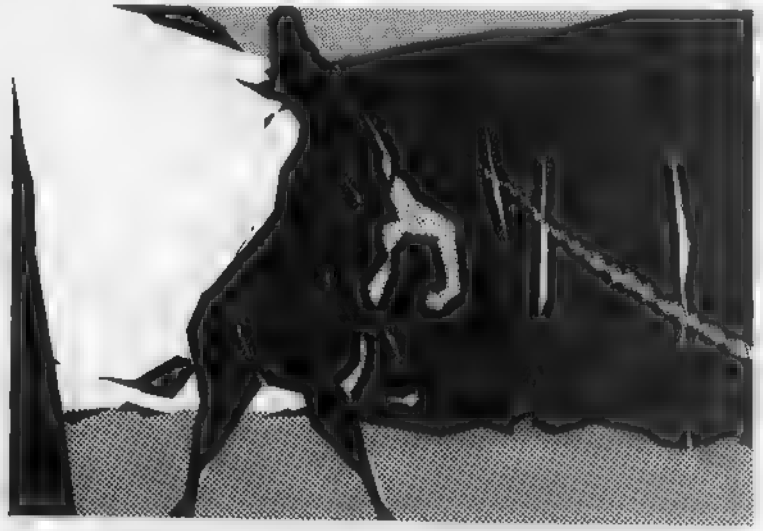
SO THE OLD HORSE WAS LEFT TO HIS SOLITARY MISERY. THE DAYS KEPT HIM COMPANY... GOLDEN ROSY DAYS, OR GREY AND HARSH AND PAINFUL ONES, FILLING THE STALL WITH THEIR WEEPING... THEY PEERED INTO HIS EYES, THEN SILENTLY DEPARTED, AS IF AWE STRICKEN...

BUT SOKOL WAS AFRAID ONLY OF THE NIGHTS, THE SHORT, FEARFUL, SILENT, STIFLING NIGHTS OF JUNE. IT WAS THEN THAT HE FELT HE WAS SURELY DYING. HE WOULD TEAR AT HIS HALTER, AND BEAT WITH HIS HOOPS AGAINST THE WALL... HE WANTED TO ESCAPE.

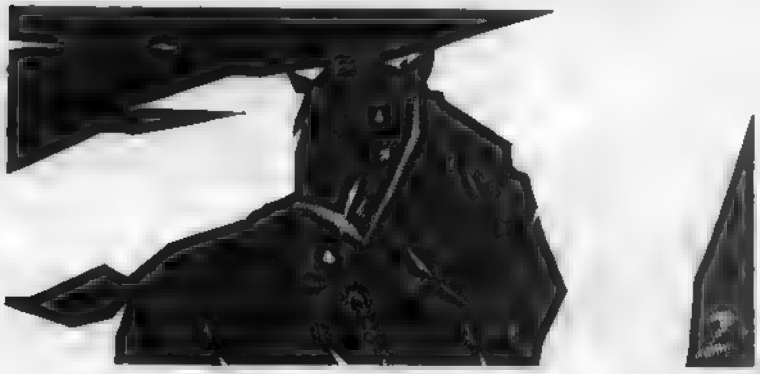


...TO RUN, AND RUN...

ONE DAY, AS THE SUN WAS SETTING, HE JUMPED UP AND BEGAN TO NEIGH LONG AND PLAINTIVELY.

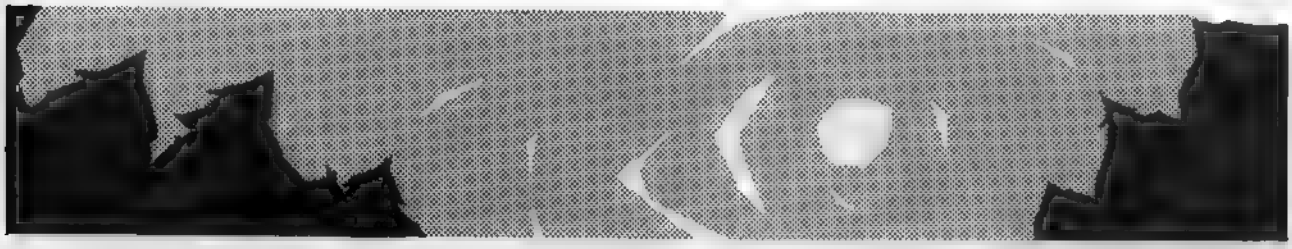


NOT A SINGLE VOICE ANSWERED HIM. FROM THE DISTANT MEADOWS WAS HEARD THE SHARP RINGING AND SWISHING OF BUSY SCYTHES.

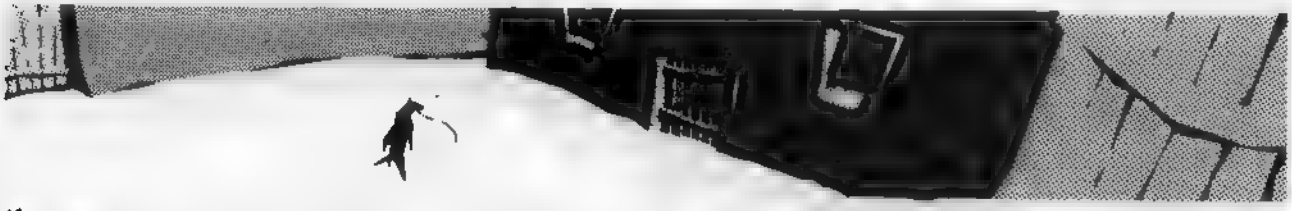


BUT ABOUT SOKOL THERE WAS A DEEP, AWFUL SILENCE THAT MADE HIM SHIVER. SOMBRE PANIC SEIZED HIM, AND HE BROKE FROM HIS HALTER.

THE SUN BLINDED HIM, AND A WILD PAIN GNAWED AT HIS ENTRAILS. LITTLE BY LITTLE HE CAME TO HIMSELF AGAIN. DIM MEMORIES OF FIELDS AND FORESTS FLOATED THROUGH HIS BRAIN.

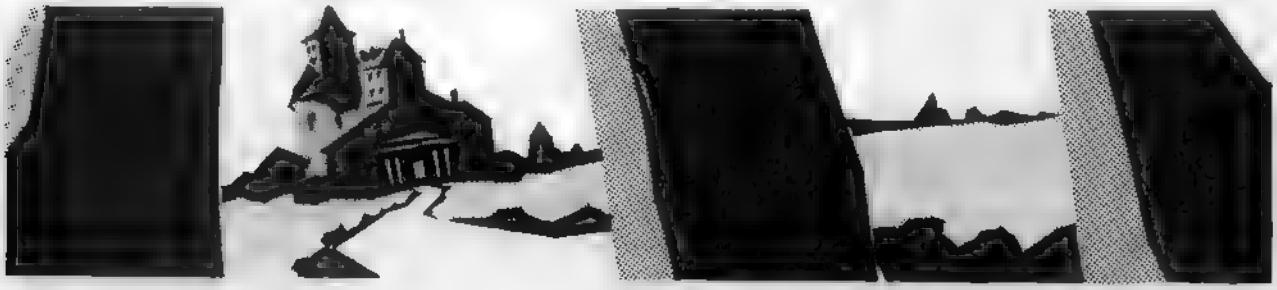


THERE AWOKE IN HIM A CRAVING THIRST TO LIVE AGAIN. HE BEGAN TO SEARCH EAGERLY FOR AN EXIT FROM THE YARD.



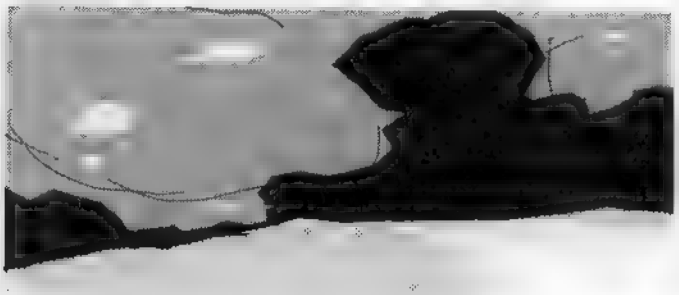
HE TRIED AGAIN AND AGAIN, THOUGH EVERY MOVEMENT CAUSED HIM INDESCRIBABLE PAIN, THOUGH THE BLOOD KEPT FLOWING FROM HIS OLD SORES...

AT LAST HE STRUCK A WOODEN FENCE FROM WHICH HE COULD SEE THE MANOR-HOUSE, AND BEGAN TO NEIGH PITEOUSLY. IF ANYONE HAD COME AND SAID A KIND WORD TO HIM, OR SMOOTHED HIS COAT CARESSINGLY, HE WILLINGLY WOULD HAVE LAIN DOWN AND DIED.



HE LEANED AGAINST THE GATE WITH ALL HIS MIGHT AND IT BURST OPEN. STILL NEIGHING PLAINTIVELY, HE STOOD BEFORE THE HOUSE FOR A LONG TIME, BUT NO ONE HEARD HIM.

SUDDENLY, HE SEEMED TO FORGET EVERYTHING... HE SAW ONLY VISIONS, AND BEGAN TO STAGGER AND STUMBLE FORWARD WITH ALL HIS WANING MIGHT...



SOKOL SHIVERED. HIS EYES GREW GLAZED WITH SUFFERING. AS HE STUMBLED ALONG HIS FEET GREW HEAVIER AND HEAVIER.

THE WHOLE EARTH SEEMED TO PULL HIM EAGERLY TOWARD ITSELF. OFTEN THE HORIZON WAS HIDDEN FROM HIS GAZE.

HIS POOR DUMB SOUL SANK DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE DARKNESS OF TERROR. RECOGNISING NOTHING, HE KEPT STAGGERING BLINDLY FORWARD AS IN A FOG.

SINKING EXHAUSTED TO THE GROUND, HE STRETCHED OUT HIS LEGS, AND NEIGHED.

HE STRUCK HIS PAWS INTO THE GROUND AND FANCIED HE WAS UP AGAIN, GALLOPING ACROSS THE FIELD... IN THE CHASE... THE HOUNDS BESIDE HIM BARKING... FLYING LIKE THE WIND.

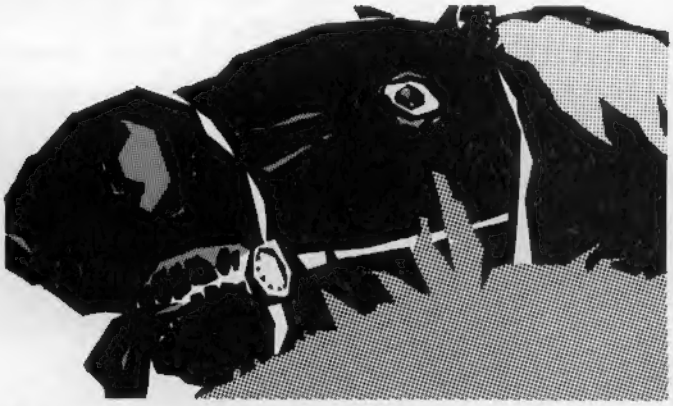
HIS AGONY GREW SO INTENSE THAT HE GAVE ONE SAVAGE NEIGH AND SPRANG TO HIS FEET.

BUT NOW HE SAW NOTHING... UNDERSTOOD NOTHING... HE FELT HIMSELF SINKING, AS IF IN A DEEP MIRE... A COLD SHIVER RAN OVER HIS BODY, AND HE LAY STILL....

THE SUN SANK. OBLITERATING TWILIGHT COVERED EVERYTHING WITH A SILENT MANTLE. THE BARKING OF A DOG GREW AUDIBLE IN THE DISTANCE.

LAPPA RAN UP TO HIS OLD FRIEND, BUT SOKOL DID NOT RECOGNISE HIM. THE OLD DOG LICKED HIM, PAWED AT THE GROUND, RAN BARKING ACROSS THE FIELD HITHER AND THITHER, CALLING FOR HELP, BUT NO ONE CAME...

THE GRASS LOOKED INTO SOKOL'S UNMOVING EYES...



THE TREES APPROACHED HIM, AND REACHED OUT THEIR SHARP, CLAW-LIKE TWIGS TO HIM.

THOUSANDS OF LIVING THINGS BEGAN TO CRAWL OVER HIS BODY, TO PINCH, AND CLAW, AND REND HIS FLESH... THE CROWS CAWED FRIGHTFULLY.

LAPPA, BRISTLING WITH TERROR, MOANED AND HOWLED WEIRDLY....

BIG RETURN

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